

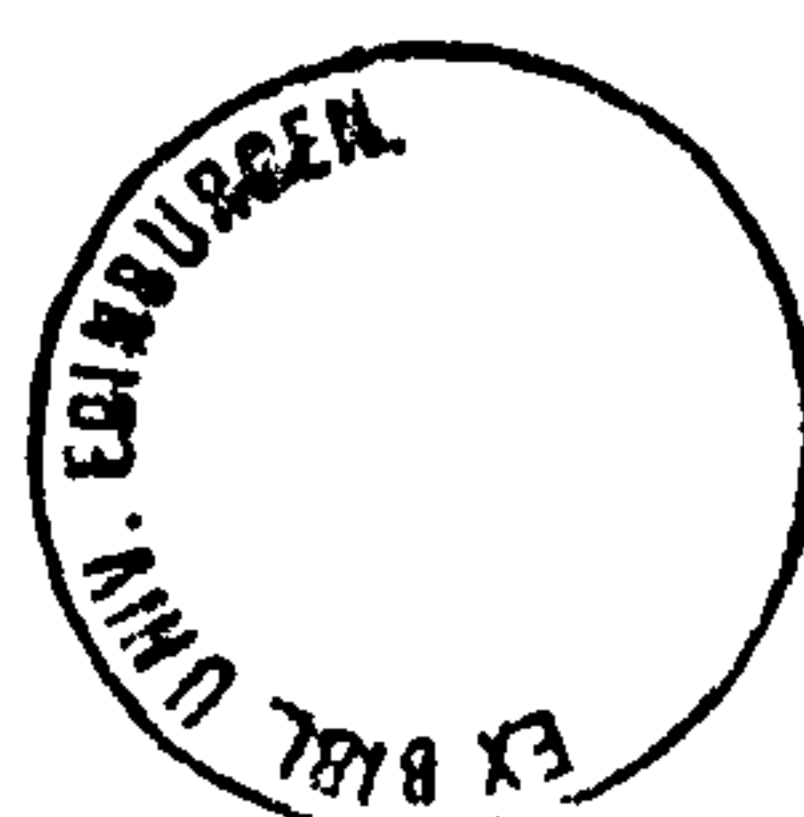
THEOLOGY AND THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE:
AN ANALYSIS AND CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

There can be no doubt that the Near-Death Experience (NDE) has become a highly influential factor shaping the contemporary Western spiritual perspective. However, it has yet to receive the serious theological attention such a phenomenon calls for. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the nature of this situation, based on a rigorous examination of the NDE research as well as a critical analysis of the interpretative context(s) which ground the existing theological treatments of the NDE.

The work begins with a presentation of the predominant theological presupposition that the significance of the NDE, or lack thereof, is to be located within eschatological, or pareschatological, boundaries exclusively. The philosophical prolegomena related to this presupposition are then established in anticipation of their use as criteria with which to investigate the actual NDE research data. Hence, the most extensive, reliable phenomenological research done to date is used to produce a detailed NDE typology based on both qualitative and quantitative NDE data. The NDE typology is then analyzed in reference to the philosophical criteria previously established.

In the next stage of the work, again, the most relevant research-based information relating to the NDE's "context" is gathered in order to gain a firm understanding of the NDE's after-effects as well as the etiologically significant points which the researchers' themselves and the "skeptics", or reductionists, have proposed. With the completion of this task it is asserted that not only is the predominant theological interpretative contextualisation of the NDE unjustified, but that, in the course of the investigation, one which is ontological has proven itself to be extremely convincing. Using a phenomenological method to re-interpret the NDE as an ontologically significant phenomena, the NDE reveals itself to be an "Imperative of Vitality" (IV), a phenomenon have to do, profoundly, with life and not death. Finally, the theological significance of the NDE as an IV is fruitfully explored within two different Christian Reformed contexts, manifesting striking ontological correlations and leading to highly informative, though, ultimately, negative theological conclusions. The work ends by calling for further explorations of the ontologically remarkable NDE within other spiritual/religious contexts.

ABBREVIATIONS

EDT	The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology
ISBE	The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
IV	Imperative of Vitality
NDE	Near-Death Experience
NIDNTT	The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Abridged in one volume)

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INTRODUCTION

The mystery of what happens to a person after his/her physical, bodily death has shaped the history of humanity in countless ways. Today the contemporary study of this topic tends to have as its primary object the "Near-Death Experience", or more popularly, the "NDE".¹ There can be no doubt that this phenomenon will, as it has in the past, continue to play a significant role in shaping not only society's conceptuality of death and the afterlife but its general spiritual perspective. However, even though the NDE has been well established as a subjectively real phenomenon experienced by approximately one in every five persons who have a actual/perceived close brush with death, the Western theological community has produced extremely brief, typically negative, and largely superficial treatments of the NDE. The primary purpose of this dissertation is therefore to explore the reasons for this situation via both a critical evaluation of 1) the most up-to-date NDE research available, as well as 2) the interpretative foundations upon which the existing theological treatments of the NDE have been based. We begin in this Introduction by taking a brief look at the history of near-death studies and making a few necessary observations about the phenomenon of the NDE itself.

In a sense it was Prospero Lambertini's *De Canonizatione* which marked the beginning of what we understand today as NDE research. It was early in the eighth century when this initial secular approach to psychic phenomena was written, opening up the field of study which is now called parapsychology. The first

collection of NDE-type experiences was probably that treasured by Dom Augustin Calmet, in the mid-1700s.² Like Calmet, yet two-hundred years later, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints used the "secular testimony" of Near-death Experiencers (NDErs) to support its religious doctrines and, thus, build-up the congregations' religious convictions.³ However, the formalised study of near-death phenomena really began to take shape with the birth of psychical research as a unique field of inquiry. At the end of the 19th century religion's status as the possessor of "truth" came under attack on various fronts. For example, the German biblical scholars were beginning to dissect the Bible, subjecting it to systematic Form Criticism. With the rapid increase in the areas of science and industry society in general became more and more secularised. The publication in 1859 of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*⁴ also helped the emerging Victorian ethos to reach a point where religious "truth", and even religion itself, seemed more and more only marginally relevant.

The reaction to this secularisation took many forms - one was psychical research. The Spiritualist movement of 1848 in the United States served as a catalyst for what came to be the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). This was founded in the United Kingdom by F.W.H. Myers and Professor Henry Sidgwick, scholars from Cambridge University, as well as by Spiritualist leaders.⁵ Rather quickly those working within the SPR became known for their intellectual honesty and rigorous investigative methods, while their unspoken hope was to prove that the

spiritual model of the human being and the universe was still valid.

One of the more prominent subjects in the early days of psychical studies proper was known as survival research. Here the experiences of the dying received a great deal of attention. Besides for the pamphlet *Daisy Dryden - a memoir by Mrs. S.H. Dryden* (1864)⁶ and the book by Frances Power Cobb *Peak in Darien - with some enquiries touching concerns of the soul and body* (1882)⁷, the work of Minot J. Savage in the 1890's and early 1900's is considered the first formal study of death-bed visions.⁸ Savage was a Unitarian minister who both collected cases and investigated them personally, a scientific activity seldom undertaken by those writing on the subject before his time.

James H. Hyslop, a Columbia University philosopher and one of Savage's close colleagues, used Savage's fully documented studies to write the paper *Visions of the Dying*. This appeared in the 1907 *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, its first edition.⁹ Later this paper was incorporated into Hyslop's famous book, *Psychical Research and the Resurrection*¹⁰ (1908), which concluded that deathbed visions were not subjective hallucinations but objectively real occurrences which the dying actually perceive. By the end of his career Hyslop felt that there was a need to examine, specifically, what happens to those people who come very close to death yet survive.¹¹ Hyslop's own research on the issue of survival directed him to various other psychic phenomena, but it was in his last book *Contact with the Other World* (1919)¹² that he made his final claim for the key position

"spontaneous incidents" at death occupy as evidence of survival.

The next landmark in the history of near-death research came when Sir William Barrett became involved. In 1926 this famous British physicist's work was published as *Deathbed Visions*¹³, an unfinished collection of various types and aspects of what happens to the dying in the last months of life. The book is "unfinished" in that Barrett died before he had the chance to conclude with his own explanatory theory of such phenomena. As a precursor to near-death studies this book is particularly important, especially because of its broad scope and number of incidents it systematically records.¹⁴ Following Barrett's death research into deathbed experiences continued, although it was not until the 1960's that any substantive work was undertaken again.

It should be pointed out at this stage that studies of the dyings' visions are similar to contemporary NDE research in a rather minimal sense, as will become clear when this type of research is described in detail in the next chapter. Of more relevance is the study of pseudo-death experiences. Particularly important is Myers' book *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*¹⁵ published in 2 volumes. Among the accounts of deathbed visions and other related psychic phenomena there appears a description of an experience that fits the present NDE "core experience".¹⁶ Other important roots of NDE research are found in medical and psychiatric research done in related areas. According to Carol Zaleski, in *Other World Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times*¹⁷, it was the 19th century "euthanasia books, forerunners of the hospice movement",

that attempted to combine personal testimonies with corresponding medical observations. This was done to show that not all those who die necessarily meet their death with pain.¹⁸ In fact, most scholars identify the true seed of NDE research with just such a pseudo-death study, that done by the Swiss mountain-climber and professor of Geology Albert Heim.

In 1871 Heim fell while mountain climbing. In the few seconds it took for him to hit the ground he experienced an expansion of time such that he was able to see his whole life pass before him. He also claims to have experienced a transfiguring "heavenly light" and a "divine calm" which "swept through" his "soul".¹⁹ Heim was subsequently motivated to learn more about what had happened to him, and thus for several decades collected other such stories from fall survivors. He actually interviewed 30 of these "survivors" and eventually came to the conclusion - his major conclusion in reference to near-death studies - that death by falling is much more painful for the on-looker and the bereaving loved ones than it is for the person that has died.²⁰

This brings us to the work of Dr. Karlis Osis of The American Society for Psychical Research. Having read the research of Barrett with great interest Osis decided to undertake a scientific survey of deathbed visions himself. From 1959-60 he sent 10,000 questionnaires to physicians and nurses, and subsequently received 540 responses. The publication of his initial findings, confirming several of Barrett's, can be found in *Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses*.²¹ In the interest of finding out what the cultural influences of deathbed visions were Osis decided to conduct further research.

Joined by another psychologist, and parapsychologist, Dr. Erlendur Haraldsson, Osis travelled to northern India and surveyed a large sample of medical personnel. Osis and Haraldsson also mailed 5,000 questionnaires to physicians and nurses in the United States. Their fundamental findings were that 1) there is a basic pattern of experiences at death, and 2) the data collected supported a hypothesis of transition to another kind of life, rather than a hypothesis that these experiences were the beginning of extinction.²²

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is credited with the scientific mapping of the dying process. The publication, in 1969, of her observations in *On Death and Dying* marks the beginnings of what is now known as the science of Thanatology, i.e., the psychological study of death and dying.²³ In the present context, the importance of this work is that it sparked interest in the scientific study of dying people and the processes through which they cope with their imminent death. It was in the wake of this best-selling book that NDE research as we know it today was about to emerge. In essence, the work of Kubler-Ross brought the taboo subject of death out into the open.

Moving back to the same type of work that was done by Osis and Haraldsson, we find Dr. Russell Noyes Jr., professor of psychiatry at the University of Iowa, and Roy Kletti, a clinical psychologist, teaming up to investigate the experiences of people who faced instances of unexpected, sudden danger. They started their work in the early part of the 1970's, before the "NDE" was described in its contemporary form. Noyes and Kletti discovered a congruous phenomenon in many of their cases,

which they ended up calling the "depersonalization syndrome". Their efforts to understand what happened to people as they had serious falls, car accidents, etc., continued well into the study of the NDE proper, while their depersonalization syndrome came to be recognised by many researchers as part of a plausible theory for interpreting NDEs. Although this concept will be described fully later, basically it posits that the NDE is grounded in a psychological dissociation from the horror of the perceived threat of death.²⁴

Both the scientific investigation and the popular understanding of the NDE came into their current form via the publication in 1975 of the little book called *Life After Life*²⁵. This was written by Dr. Raymond Moody, a young physician who had previously been a teacher of Philosophy. It was in his North Carolina College classroom that philosophical questions about the soul and its immortality caused several of his students to offer accounts of experiences their relatives had had while near to death. By the time Moody entered medical school in 1972 he had collected a "sizeable number" of these types of experiences. Moody tells his readers that he mentioned his "informal study" to some of his medical friends and eventually ended up giving numerous public talks on the subject. As he became known for his "interest", doctors began referring him to their patients who had been resuscitated and then "reported unusual experiences". From these accounts and from accounts sent to him in the mail - due to newspaper articles about him - Moody eventually collected 150 cases. From 50 of these he produced his instant best seller.²⁶

Because of the book's immense popularity, and hence its exposure of such experiences in the popular media, neither the scientists nor the psychologists could turn their backs on the NDE. Written by a medical doctor, *Life After Life* enjoyed the status of being "credible" compared to many of the religious and parapsychological works dealing with related topics. In the history of NDE research then, *Life After Life* marks the point at which both the larger scientific community and Western society are confronted with accounts of people who had been close to death and had experienced what appeared to be another realm or level of existence.

There is no question that it is the Moody-type phenomenon which has become the prevailing conceptualisation of "near-death experiences" in the Western mind, and thus, it is the subject of this thesis. With this in mind the NDE itself is here introduced in the form of Moody's "theoretically 'ideal' or 'complete' experience"²⁷:

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a 'body', but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to

happen. Others come to meet and help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm spirit of a kind he never encountered before - a being of light - appears before him. This being asks him a question, nonverbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.²⁸

Now that we have a general idea of the NDE's as a phenomenon, as well as the historical context of NDE studies, we need to determine more precisely than was stated above what its numerical relevance, in terms of its frequency of occurrence, actually is. The best information to-date comes from the random sampling done in 1982 by the Gallup Polling Organisation in the United States. These people asked 1,500 scientifically selected, representative persons over the age of 18 years the question, "Have you, yourself, ever been on the verge of death or had a 'close call' which involved any unusual experiences at that time?"²⁹ From the responses they received to this, and other related questions, it was

determined that 15% had had a close brush with death and that 35% of these remembered having NDE-type experiences. Therefore it was estimated that approximately 5% of the total adult population had had an NDE, i.e., 8 million people in the U.S.A.³⁰ The Gallup Organisation authenticated, in a broad sense, the independent results of two other significant NDE studies: Dr. Kenneth Ring reported that out of 102 cases of survivors of near-death incidents 40% related NDEs³¹ and Dr. Michael Sabom found that of 78 people who experienced a "near-death crisis event" 34 reported an NDE, bringing his figure to 43%³². This means that about one in twenty adults (at least in the United States) is likely to have an NDE, and of those who have a close brush with death it is probable that approximately two out of five will have an NDE.

Is it not obvious then that theologians should be concerned about such a large population of NDErs? Even a cursory consideration of Moody's hypothetical case makes it plain that the NDE event raises numerous theological questions. It would seem that many of these would be centred around the theme of consciousness and personal identity transcending the physical body, and in particular, the possibility of existence beyond physical death. Examples of such issues include: the nature of human being in terms of spirit, soul, and body; the immortality of the "soul"; resurrection; an intermediate state between death and resurrection; etc. Other apparently relevant matters have to do with divine judgement in the light of the NDE life-review particularly and divine providence in relation to the NDEr's ability, in some cases, to make his/her own decision as to whether to return to physical existence or

not. These are but a few points of apparent theological significance which would suggest that the NDE is a phenomenon that needs to be seriously addressed.

A relatively recent piece of research, that has been done in the context of NDEs and theology, aimed to find out what the knowledge and attitudes about the NDE were among a group of representatively selected Pennsylvania and Illinois Clergy. It was found that approximately 98% of those who responded had heard of the NDE, yet "many"³³ only identified correctly one of the generally accepted 15 NDE characteristics or elements. In short, it was concluded that these religious leaders lacked a "comprehensive understanding of the topic". However, 47% did indeed feel that they "had a responsibility" to counsel members of their churches who have NDEs; 48% replied that they had actually done such counselling; and half reported that they would be willing to take part in a "program" to learn more about NDEs.³⁴

To this day the work has yet to be done which could supply such willing pastoral leaders with the appropriate theological information. As we will see in detail in chapter one, among even those few, brief theological considerations of the NDE which do exist there is invariably a critical lack of methodological attention given to the subject. In other words, it is believed that the vast majority of theological treatments of the NDE are founded on assumptions which themselves go unexamined, assumptions which ultimately undermine these treatments. To date there are psychological, parapsychological, physiological, sociological, philosophical as well as spiritualist treatments of the NDE in relative abundance, while substantial theological

investigations number only one.³⁵ Therefore, given the NDE's highly influential role concerning the West's general spiritual orientation, what seems to be the obvious theological relevance of it phenomenologically, its not inconsiderable frequency of occurrence (at least in the West), and its extremely limited and largely skewed treatment theologically it is all too clear that this situation needs to be critically investigated in great detail. Let us begin then by turning our attention to the ways in which the modern near-death experience has been dealt with in a theological context.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ This term was coined by Raymond A Moody, Jr, in his now classic book on the phenomena of such near-to-death experiences *Life After Life*. The term "near-death experiences" appears for the first time on page 14. (Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975) *Life after life*. Mockingbird Books, New York).
- ² Rogo, D.S. (1989) *The return from silence a study of near-death experiences*. The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, 42.
- ³ The fact that there are no first-hand NDE accounts to be found in the Mormon records strongly suggests that the actual experiences had been altered by the Mormon leaders for this purpose. (Rogo, 43). This was specifically aimed at bolstering the belief in the co-existent reality of the "world of the spirits". (Lundahl, C.R. (1983) The Mormon explanation of near-death experiences. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3 (1), 97-106).
- ⁴ Darwin, C. (1869) *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or, the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. Murray, J., London.
- ⁵ In the United States it was William James, a philosopher and psychologist, who led the field in psychical research. For James' work which is most relevant to the subject at hand see, James, W. (1901) *The varieties of religious experience*. Signet, New York.
- ⁶ I have only been able to locate a 1906 edition: Dryden, S.H. (1906) *Daisy Dryden: a memoir*. James Speirs, London.
- ⁷ Cobb, F.P. (1882) *Peak in Darien - with some enquiries touching concerns of the soul and body*. Williams and Norgate, London.
- ⁸ Rogo, 47-50.
- ⁹ Hyslop, J.H. (1907) *Visions of the dying*. *The Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 1, 45-55.
- ¹⁰ Hyslop, J.H. (1908) *Psychical research and the resurrection*. Small, Maynard and Co. New York.
- ¹¹ Rogo, 51.

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- ¹² Hyslop, J.H. (1919) *Contact with the otherworld*. Century, New York.
- ¹³ Barrett, W. (1926) *Death-bed visions*. Methuen, London.
- ¹⁴ *Deathbed Visions* is composed of five chapters, each concerning a different genre of deathbed phenomena. "Peak-in Darien" cases are the subject of chapter one, where the dying person is "taken away" by a spiritual guide of some sort. The second chapter is entitled "Visions Seen by the Dying of Persons Known by Them to be Dead and Deathbed Visions Seen by Others", documenting a few cases where visitors of the dying actually see the vision that the dying person sees. This type of phenomenon is important to NDE research, for such occurrences can serve as veridical elements in the NDE. The last three chapters touch on related topics: visions of people still living, the hearing of heavenly "music", and the body of the dying.
- ¹⁵ Myers, F.W.H. (1903) *Human personality and its survival of bodily death*. Longman's, London.
- ¹⁶ Parapsychologist Scott Rogo called this a "pseudo-NDE". (Rogo, 58-60).
- ¹⁷ Zaleski, C. (1987) *Otherworld journeys: accounts of near-death experiences in medieval and modern times*. Oxford University Press Inc, New York.
- ¹⁸ Zaleski, 99.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Heim's findings were first published in the yearbook of survivors Alpine Club. (Heim, A. (1892) *Notizen uber den tod durch absturz*. *Jarbuch des Schweizer Alpenclub*, 27, 327-337. translated (1972) as *The experience of dying from falls*. Noyes, R., and Kletti, R., *Omega*, 3, 45-52).
- ²¹ Osis, K. (1961) *Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses*. Parapsychological Monographs, New York.
- ²² Osis, K., and Haraldsson, E. (1977) *At the hour of death*. Avon, New York.
- ²³ Kubler-Ross, E. (1969) *On Death and Dying*. Macmillan, New York. She had been with terminally ill patients for years previous to her official study.

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- ²⁴ Noyes, R., and Kletti R. (1976) Depersonalisation in the face of life threatening danger: an interpretation. *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 7, 103-114.
- ²⁵ Moody, op. cit.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 15-16.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 21.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 21-23.
- ²⁹ Gallup, G.Jr., with Proctor, W. (1983) *Adventures in immortality: a look beyond the threshold of death*. Souvenir, London, 183.
- ³⁰ See Gallup's Appendix for all statistical tables.
- ³¹ Ring, K. (1984) *Heading towards omega: in search of the meaning of the near-death experience*. William Morrow, New York, 34.
- ³² Sabom, M. (1982) *Recollections of death: a medical investigation*. Corgi Books, Transworld Publishers LTD, London, 56-57.
- ³³ Throughout this thesis such quantifying terms will appear in quotes, taken directly from the research in question, whenever more precise statistical information has not been offered.
- ³⁴ 2,722 mailed questionnaires were sent and 320 usable ones returned. (Bechtel, L.J., Walker B.A., Chen, A., and Pierce, R.A., (1992) Assessment of clergy knowledge and attitudes toward near death experiences. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 10 (3), 161-170).
- ³⁵ This is Zaleski's *Other World Journeys*, op. cit.

CHAPTER ONE:
UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

1.0 Introduction: The Theological Challenge

At the same time that the modern study of the NDE was catching the attention of serious scholars from many different fields, the then Archdeacon of Durham issued a challenge to the theological world, writing:

Modern resuscitation techniques are enabling us to describe the phenomenology of death with more precision than ever before. The task of integrating this new knowledge with Christian theology has hardly begun. The prospect is a daunting one, because there is (as ever in parapsychology) more than one interpretation to each experience. But it is one of the most urgent tasks of contemporary theology to begin it.¹

Such an open and enthusiastic attitude towards the NDE has seldom surfaced in the field of theology studies in the intervening seventeen years. The attitude most often expressed has been one of scepticism or outright rejection. A typical, clear articulation of this attitude is given in the same journal - some fourteen years after Perry's optimistic challenge - by the (then) Bishop of St. Andrews: "The current interest in NDE studies can be explained by the search for an apparently scientific reassurance about life after death in an age which has abandoned faith."² From what can be found published on the modern NDE in the area of theology, it seems that the Bishop would get more than a sympathetic hearing from most theologians. In the vast majority of instances where the NDE has received serious attention -

usually in only a single chapter or at most a journal article - the assumption is made that the NDE must be interpreted essentially, if not exclusively, in eschatological, or pareschatological, terms.³ It is little wonder that such a conceptual premise has shaped most theological treatments of the NDE given the popular portrayal of the NDE as a phenomenon which seems to offer an experientially based knowledge of what happens when a person dies.⁴ Yet the question is whether choosing such an interpretative context is actually consistent with the NDE research data itself. Indeed this may not be the case. Thus the issue becomes, whether, in their attempts to comment on the theological significance of the NDE, these scholars have been asking the right questions? Could it be that, fundamentally, "asking the wrong questions" is at the root of why an abandonment of the subject altogether has become the norm? Seeking the answers to these questions is therefore what we need to do.

Thus, in this chapter we begin our investigation of the NDE starting with a critical assessment of the predominant theological assumption that the primary significance of the NDE has to do with what it can, or cannot, tell us about the survival of physical death. Section one provides a brief introduction to some representative examples of this point of view, broken down into three distinguishable groups. In the second half of the chapter we will set up the criteria from which (in the chapters to follow) we should be able to judge not just the degree of validity the above theological assumption actually enjoys, but what the

proper interpretative context for understanding the primary significance of the NDE really is.

2.0 The Three Basic Theological Approaches to the NDE

Focusing more specifically on how theologians have interpreted the NDE, it is possible to identify three relatively distinctive perspectives. From the first the NDE is viewed as a literal experience of death. In the second the researcher posits that the NDE has been mistakenly interpreted by most people as a literal experience of death, while in fact it is actually some kind of symbolic death experience. Most scholars however belong to the third group. From their reductionist viewpoint they maintain that, as a phenomenon which others falsely believe to be a literal/symbolic experience of death, the NDE is in all probability a psychologically, physiologically, and/or pharmacologically based delusion.

In those few cases which take the first position it is believed that the NDE is probably a literal experience of death itself, which might even be a direct revelation concerning subjects such as the immortality of the soul; resurrection; judgement; the nature of heaven, hell, and purgatory; etc. For instance Edward Hunter intimates that, in the light of the apostle Paul's experience recorded in 2 Corinthians, the NDE is an actual journey of the soul into a spiritual, transcendent realm. Therefore, the NDE provides confirmation and assurance to us all that we will survive bodily death and that nothing can separate the

faithful from God.⁵ A more cautious, yet similar approach is exemplified by Paul Badham:

My own view is that if these experiences (i.e. NDEs) cannot be related to the particular nature of the patient's terminal illness, nor to his psychological state, cultural background or religious beliefs, and if no other plausible explanation can be put forward, then we have some grounds for accepting them as being what their percipients claim them to be - reports of what actually happens at the moment of death. And what appears to happen is that the soul leaves the body and begins to move on to another mode of existence....There is therefore at least some evidence to support the belief in the immortality of the self through bodily death.⁶

Responding to his own challenge Perry reached the conclusion that the NDE indeed shows us what it feels like to die and, quite possibly, may even be a reliable source of information concerning the "first few moments of the life to come".⁷ Perhaps the most interesting aspect of such a Christian, parapsychological attitude is illustrated by Perry's belief that, like those which are used to understand the NDE, the "facts and theories related to parapsychology...help some people to see that their leap of faith is credible."⁸

In contrast to this attitude is a conservative, biblically based Christian interpretation of the NDE as a demonic deception. In such cases the NDE is described as a clever trick by the devil, which provides a false sense of confidence, by trivialising sin and divine judgement, and stimulates participation in occult activities.⁹ This represents the far right position within the second group, consisting of those who simultaneously reject the NDE as a literal death

experience yet accept it as a very "real" spiritual, paranormal, and/or mystical experience of symbolic death. The liberal position within this group can be just as extreme and engaging. For example, the Jungian theologian John Heaney sees nothing evil about the experience, believing it to be a real, transpersonal archetypal experience of death. Although it is not given the status of a literal death experience, Heaney claims that like other highly positive mystical experiences the NDE has the potential to facilitate a change of horizon towards a spiritual, lasting reformation of one's life.¹⁰ In the most scholarly and extensive treatment of the NDE within a theological context to date, Carol Zaleski takes what might be called a psycho-literary approach:

It appears to be impossible, in any case, to determine objectively whether near-death reports are accurate or inaccurate depictions of the future life. It might therefore be more fruitful for theologians to consider near-death visions as works of the religious imagination, whose function is to communicate meaning through symbolic forms rather than to copy external facts. This is the aspect of near-death literature that I have attempted to highlight.¹¹

It must be stressed that by far the most frequent handling of the NDE comes from those belonging to the third group, members of which invariably consist of those commenting on the NDE in the context of a treatment of some par/eschatological topic. In most cases it is pointed out first that the NDE seems to be eschatologically informative. It is then explained why this is not so. Hardly surprising is the author's subsequent abandonment of the topic, given the NDE's

stated irrelevance to the primary subject of his/her work.

For one of the more detailed instances of this we turn to Hans Küng. In the beginning of his *Eternal Life?* Küng introduces the popular conception of the NDE; describes how similar phenomena can be produced pharmacologically, physiologically, or psychologically; and then presents other, unpleasant death experiences. Thus, he argues that in the context of "a priori" statements, NDEs "have nothing to do with the 'other side', nothing to do with the supra-sensible 'beyond', (and) nothing to do with life after death." He does not fail to also make the most common - practically obligatory - point among those within this group: the NDE represents a "stage of life" because NDErs were not literally "dead" but only suffered clinical death.¹²

Recently the then Archbishop of York reminded "orthodox" Christians that beliefs about what takes place after death should not be based on the NDE, but on the "character and purpose of God, and in the Resurrection of Christ". At the same time that he distances himself from those who believe that the NDE is a literal death experience he also steers clear of the reductionistic viewpoint, or unconstructive silence, characteristic of the third, relating,

If pressed on the subject I would have been willing to ascribe many of the overt features of NDEs to psychological or physiological changes on the threshold of death....

Even so, given this kind of interpretation, there is no reason why a physiological phenomenon should not carry a valid spiritual meaning...Different levels of explanation need not necessarily exclude each other.¹³

Like those in group two, Habgood may hold that the NDE is best understood to be a symbolic experience of death. However, since he does not present a final interpretation it can safely be said that Habgood communicates a renewed, valid challenge to theologians to deal with the NDE in a new way. In a sense, the call for scholars to fully investigate the theological significance of the NDE has been made quite frequently in the past eighteen years, albeit negatively, each time a "reductionist" has rejected the NDE as an eschatologically significant phenomenon. The important difference between the reductionists and Habgood is that the later seems open to a scholarly examination of the NDE outside of an par/eschatological context. Again, it is believed that a critical investigation of the predominant assumption made by most theologians when approaching the NDE - that the NDE's primary theological significance, or even relevance, is bounded by par/eschatological concepts - will provide us with a relatively new set of questions from which more accurate theological interpretations of the NDE can be formulated.

3.0 Examining The Predominant Interpretative Context: A Beginning

Concerning the various examples of psychical phenomena which many have assessed as evidence that human beings survive physical death, Terence Penelhum observes:

In a clear sense the logical investigation of the concept of survival is prior to such an assessment, since only if the concept of survival is coherent can it be offered as an explanation of these, or any, examples. On the

other hand, anyone who argues that the doctrine of survival is unintelligible is ruling out, a priori, the most natural account of the phenomena, and the one in terms of which those involved in them present them. This should not be done lightly, since if this explanatory recourse is ruled out, we may find ourselves resorting to theories of equal or greater obscurity, or refusing, like ostriches, to scrutinise the evidence at all.¹⁴

As we have seen above, no matter which of the three interpretative standpoints are taken, most theologians operate from the grounding question, Is the NDE eschatologically meaningful?, or, to put it in its most specific form, Can the NDE tell us anything about survival of physical death? In the light of Penelhum's sound advice, we should be able to progress a long way in discerning the actual value of this question if we start with an inquiry into how survival of physical death may be intelligibly conceived. It seems reasonable to assert that the degree to which our conceptuality of the NDE corresponds to those concepts which make the survival of physical death a logical possibility - if indeed there are any - should be the same as the degree to which any interpretation of the NDE can be eschatologically contextualized. We would be rightfully criticised though if this scrutinization of the NDE itself, i.e., the content of the actual NDE event, was strictly limited to a comparison with what appears to be philosophically feasible. As Paterson observes, the problem of post-mortem existence is "not a purely philosophical problem but is an intellectually composite problem, made up of both philosophical and empirical elements".¹⁵ Therefore, our observations in this endeavour will ultimately be judged alongside those

to be made later, when we examine the far more empirically analysable NDE context, i.e., the nature of the circumstances which trigger NDEs and the more commonly reported effects the NDE has on experiencers after the NDE event itself. Presently we must identify and investigate those concepts which have been consistently cited by scholars as being the most reasonable in maintaining the logical possibility of a person's survival of physical death.

Generally, among contemporary Western philosophers the post-mortem existence of an individual person is not considered a logical possibility. Notwithstanding this fact, there are some who claim that a rational defence of personal survival is possible, or at least is conceptually no less intelligible than the complete extinction of the person upon physical death. If approached with an open mind this ongoing debate can still lead to stimulating and important reflection; the desire to understand the nature of one's own finitude no doubt has motivated human beings for thousands of years to take a convicted stand about the ultimate meaning of life. Unfortunately though, it is neither our aim nor within the scope of this investigation to present a critically formulated "solution", as it were. Again, the task at hand is to distinguish what the salient features are for rationally defending the notion of post-mortem existence. We do undertake this with a critical attitude however - our guiding principle will be to seek out those features necessary to justify the par/eschatological contextualisation of the NDE by being both 1) supportive of the logical possibility of personal survival, and 2) not inconsistent with the

basic character of the NDE as it has become widely known.

It is impossible to know precisely how many "reasoned" concepts of survival have been held throughout history, but those most familiar to someone living in the West today would typically be based on the ideas of reincarnation, resurrection, and/or disembodied existence. The rather obvious problem which all such notions are seeking to solve is that being human necessarily means that at some time in their future every living person will suffer physical death.¹⁶ Even many of those who, by faithfully adhering to relevant religious doctrines, do not see this as an unsolved puzzle will nevertheless possess the desire to understand the rationality of their own position on the matter.¹⁷ Representing the mainstream philosophical evaluation of the issue, Anthony Flew has identified the three basic ways which are used to overcome, in a reasoned way, what he calls this "universal fact of death": 1) the "Platonic or Platonic-Cartesian way", 2) the "way of the astral body", and 3) the "reconstitutionist way".¹⁸ In practice one would be hard pressed to find anyone arguing for personal survival based on only one of these; the weaknesses of one tend to be lessened by some version of one or more of the others.¹⁹ For the sake of clarity though we will here only consider each individually, in its unqualified form.

In its purest form the concept of reconstitution/resurrection can be described in two statements. A "person" ceases to exist, in an absolute sense, at the moment of his/her physical death. The

exact same person is reconstituted at that moment when the same physical body, or something of a kind based on it, is somehow brought (back) into existence.²⁰ By definition then, a comparison between this notion of survival and the NDE can be immediately ruled out: in relation to survival of physical death, the NDEr's fundamental claim is that he/she did not cease to exist upon the occasion of what often appears to be the death of his/her physical body. The other two ways offers more promising alternatives.

According the way of the Astral body, during their earthly lives, individuals are made up of a mortal, physical body and an "internal", immortal "real" self. This self is said to be corporeal and is often described as being in the same form as the physical body.²¹ Based on a general knowledge of the NDE, one might say then that the astral body concept seems quite comparable to the NDE in that given recourse to a material substance this putatively exist apart from the physical body one can speak in a reasonable fashion of NDErs existing in some particular, physical place (e.g. above their own physical bodies observing resuscitation procedures). Although this is not the only advantage the astral body concept has over that of a completely immaterial person, as in the Platonic/Cartesian way, among even dualists such a method of proposing the logical possibility of survival is generally rejected. Fundamentally, it is argued that there are other, more convincing theories (e.g., extra sensory perception) to account for the phenomena (e.g. apparitions) in relation to which the astral body hypothesis has come into being. It is therefore usually described as some kind of fantasy,

which, when carefully examined, though able to escape from some of the conceptual difficulties associated with the highly pervasive idea of disembodied existence causes many of its own. For example, If it represents the "real" person even during their embodied existence, Why is a person completely unaware of having an astral body? We might also ask, What sense can one make of the materially substantial astral body actually surviving a person's physical death without qualifying it to the point of eventually equating it with absolute, non-material disembodiment? It has been generally agreed that, ultimately, his "way" could only be a viable solution to the problem of survival if some kind of phenomena existed which could not be more intelligibly understood in another fashion.²² In order to make the claim that the NDE satisfies this requirement we would first have to assume a par/eschatological contextualization of the NDE. As this is the basic issue to be investigated, it would be quite unreasonable to do so. Even if we did, two well-know NDE characteristics strongly suggest that much of the phenomena fundamental to the positing of the astral body conception stand in sharp contrast to well known NDE phenomena, i.e., NDErs are never detected by others present during their putative Out-of-Body-States and invariably complain of not being able to effect physical matter in any way. Putting the astral body way to the side, we can now move on to the Platonic/Cartesian way.

Just as NDErs typically maintain that their "real" selves existed outside of what seemed to be their dying or dead physical bodies, Platonists posit that when the physical body dies the person continues to exist in a

disembodied state. The critical point of similarity with the NDE here is the dualistic premise that not only are human beings composed of a mortal, physical body and an incorporeal, immortal soul, but that the soul (or in more contemporary, philosophical language the mind) itself is the "real" person.²³ Anyone familiar at all with the NDE would have to admit that there is indeed a positive relationship between its popular portrayal and these dualistic premises. Images of a "person" hovering above his/her unconscious body, sprawled out at the scene of an accident or being attended to on the operating table have become part and parcel of our contemporary, Western conception not just of dying, but of who we really are.

From our observations thus far then it would seem that the contextualization of the NDE in par/eschatological terms is acceptable to the extent in which the NDE event can be harmonised with a dualistic notion of human beings. In the first place this necessitates asserting the composite nature of human beings. Equally important to our task will be to see how close the NDE event can take us to the point of maintaining that the immaterial part of a human being which survives the death of the physical body is what that human being truly is, i.e., the "real" self or person. Having now identified some survival criteria, it could appear that we have enough general information about the logical possibility of survival which might fruitfully be compared with a general knowledge of the NDE. Resisting the temptation to make a quick, yet partially-informed judgement, we will continue to delve further into the idea of disembodied survival.

The first step in examining the Platonic/Cartesian solution to the "universal fact of death" is to break down the problem into its three distinct yet interrelated elements, the ontological, epistemological and the existential. The first is concerned with determining what it is that survives death such that it can be properly described as a person, while the epistemological with identifying this post-mortem person with some previously living pre-mortem individual. At the heart of the third, existential, element is the prospect of ascertaining the kinds of experiences a subject in a post-mortem world might have such that this subject could be identified as a person. Although all three are significant, the ontological question - What is it that survives such that a "person" continues to exist? - is by far the most important. Paterson describes this in terms of "understanding the claim" that a person has survived, in contrast to how we might "substantiate the claim", i.e., the epistemological concern.²⁴ At the end of the day though, it simply would not be reasonable for us to ask what survives without also addressing the issue of how, i.e., the existential question.

According to his own dualistic approach to the concept of post-mortem existence, H.D. Lewis acknowledges that survival of physical death is possible only if one can posit "an acceptable idea of person which does not involve identity with, or dependence upon, our present physical bodies"²⁵ As we will soon see, not having recourse to the physical body as the necessary, or even a sufficient, condition of continued existence is highly problematic, yet it is easy to

discern that Lewis' statement rightfully presupposes something even more fundamental. The concept of personhood itself is the foundation upon which all arguments concerning survival, both for or against, rest. How could it be otherwise, for if we are to decide what the necessary conditions are for the continued existence of X, and whether or not these could actually be verified, we must certainly need to determine first the essential nature of X itself. Consequently, all of our criteria for positing the logical possibility of survival should centre on how we have approached and answered the question, What is a person? Now since a disembodied "person" is the object of our investigation, or our "X" as it were, our first task should be to establish what the essential nature of being a disembodied person is. Although, given what seems to be a subject which almost by definition extends beyond our "normal", everyday experience, the question of verification becomes entwined with the purely ontological. With this in mind, we continue below, focusing our attention on a simultaneous consideration of the ontological and epistemological elements of disembodied survival.

Anthony Flew, the persistent campaigner against all things dualists, succinctly introduces us to the practical difficulty which confronts us:

...everyone's paradigms of what persons are members of our own particular species of flesh and blood organisms. Given a firm insistence on this starting point there is, ...'no tormenting philosophical problem of personal identity here. The simple solution is that a person at time two was the same person as a person at time one if and only if the former has been materially continuous with the latter....the prisoner in the dock would be

conclusively shown to have been the woman who committed the murder if witnesses to that crime had kept the murderer under continuous observation ever since, and are now testifying that the prisoner is indeed the person thus observed.'²⁶

Flew's materialistic, physicalist position is admittedly truistic²⁷; although any given individual person X undergoes constant change in the course of his/her life, that which makes it intelligible to speak of X's continuous existence through time is X's "materially continuous", "flesh and blood" body. As suggested above, the description of persons and their identities becomes a philosophical problem as soon as the assumption is made that the "real" person is not numerically identical with the (living) physical body, e.g., that the real person is properly described in terms of an intangible "mind", "soul", "self", etc. The issue of a person's being itself is here virtually limited to the challenge of identifying, and thus differentiating, individual persons. Hence, our primary question - What is a person? - becomes rather more pointed: On what grounds can we assert and intelligibly describe the continued existence of a disembodied being, as a particular person, through time?²⁸ The various answers that have been put forward can be categorised in two ways.

By appealing to an individual's memories and/or characteristic personality "traits, aptitudes, and skills", many have found a psychological approach feasible.²⁹ In most cases though it is an individual's unique personal memories that those who support disembodied existence depend upon when addressing the

ontological/epistemological question. The rather straightforward line of reasoning will be that because (disembodied) person X believes his memories are of Joe Smith's past earthly life, (disembodied) person X must be Joe Smith. There should be no mistake, this view is not only popular among the "philosophically uninformed". For example, in his attempts to investigate survival Arthur Berger, Director of the International Institute for the Study of Death and President of the Survival Research Foundation, says that he is primarily searching for evidence that "any conscious remembering and identifiable component of the human being" can survive physical death.³⁰ His method is based on whether or not he receives from a post-mortem individual the "key" to a "puzzle" which only this individual possessed before his/her physical death. Berger, one who must certainly have a sophisticated understanding of the issues at stake, obviously believes that memory is a vital criterion for positing survival³¹, and therefore for positing individuated personhood.

Yet as most will agree, memories, especially accurate or "true" memories, are all too often faulty or down right deceptive. It is therefore fairly easy to argue that without a way of obtaining some kind of publicly available evidence which could positively show that (disembodied) person X's memories of doing/experiencing something in the past from Joe Smith's history is actually the same Joe Smith (e.g., his externally observable presence at the events in question), it would not be reasonable to assert X's personal identity from X's memories. "Publicly available" is the key idea here, for some people, in

investigating survival, have claimed that it is not inconceivable for a disembodied person's personal memories to be validated by other disembodied persons.³² Of course this raises the question of what kind of existence disembodied persons might enjoy. We will return to this, the existential question, below.

Hence, among even sympathetic dualists, it is widely believed that this line of reasoning - now typically identified with John Locke's own attempts to understand the nature of personal identity - cannot solve the problem completely. Joseph Butler, a full fledged dualist himself, articulated what is probably the most succinct and effective objection to the memory criterion to-date: personal memories presuppose personal identity and therefore cannot be called upon to establish it.³³ Respectable scholars do continue to use personal memory in this context, albeit, typically in a supplementary fashion. For example, consider the following from Lewis' discussion of post-mortem existence,

The question of linkage, in a future existence, with our present existence, has further difficulties. They would partly be met by dependence on memory, and I see no reason to doubt that, if I became convinced that I was in another existence, and seemed to have clear memories of the present life, I could put considerable credence upon it, as I do now when I wake up and without any checking.³⁴

This passage underlines once again the constraints on our method; positing personhood compels us to posit personhood through time, begging the question of how to re-identify, and therefore differentiate among individual persons. Accordingly, in Lewis' mind a valid

reply to the ontological question should include, beyond the notion of memory and building on it, "further describable features of a person, his likes and dislikes, history, etc., a man's identifiable character about which others may know in substantially the same way as himself".³⁵ Popular though it may be, this method is also open to severe criticism, particularly in those cases where it is given a leading role in the endeavour to establish personhood itself. To reason that personhood can be established according one's character - or, as Paterson would have it, a "certain pattern of responses" - is to risk making the rather problematic assumptions that an individual's character 1) is fundamentally predicable through time, and, more importantly, 2) can be conceptualised in terms of an (absolutely) unique "pattern".³⁶

If memory is not explicitly called upon by itself, it is highly likely that such a psychological approach will also be founded on the notion that the disembodied person consists of a series of connected perceptions and/or experiences. To be more precise, in these cases it is usually maintained that the person is actually that which owns a given stream of consciousness. Indeed, this assertion has enjoyed great historical favour, even if it has been tacit. In the recent past, beginning most notably with David Hume³⁷, a whole host of philosophers have struggled with what has become viewed as an essentially Cartesian problem, endeavouring to make sense of what it means for a person to be the owning or linking "substance" of consciousness.³⁸ Many would say that we have now gone beyond the "psychological" approach as described above, and have

entered the second, general category of ways to solve the ontological problem of disembodied being. Not unrelated to the psychological approaches, the aim is to establish disembodied existence on the basis of a wholly transcendental understanding of personhood. Usually this means that one is either speaking of a "soul", or a given, irreducible "I".³⁹

Even Paterson's brief definition of the soul makes it comparatively clear how such a representation of personhood could be used to meet the difficulties we have identified above, particularly in regard to the Cartesian problem: "We may conceive of the soul as a simple entity or 'substance', existing independently, in itself unchanging, but underlying and 'owning' the individual's diverse and changing mental states and attributes."⁴⁰ Special note should be taken here that Paterson does not identify the soul with the individual's consciousness per se. Indeed it would seem that such an identification probably belongs more appropriately to the Cartesian "soul", while Plato bases the "soul" on his notion of "ideas" or "forms". Whether Plato's "soul" is described in terms of the true person or the principle of life for the individual, as the real self⁴¹ it is not, as it arguably is for the Cartesian dualist, synonymous with the "mental states and attributes" of an immaterial substance.

As one of the well-known proponents of this view, Paul Badham, through more than 20 years of scholarly research, has argued that the Cartesian concept of the mind can be used to logically establish personal identity. An example of this approach is found in *Christian beliefs about life after death*, the published

version of Badham's doctoral thesis. In the chapter entitled "A Defence of the Concept of the Soul" we get a thorough presentation of Badham's Cartesian apologetic. Engaging such scholars as Ayer, Russell and Wittgenstein, he champions the transcendent concept of personal identity, e.g.:

Descartes is not concerned just to show that a thinking being must of necessity be an existent being. His aim is rather to show that my thinking is of the essence of my identity. It is the fact that I think that makes me 'me'. Descartes wants to show that my mind is in fact my 'substance', whereas my body is in a strict sense 'accidental' to me.⁴²

Whether or not the existence of the soul is derived from, and/or equated with, the existence of the mind, like each of the psychological attempts to answer the ontological question, this method of asserting the continued existence of a disembodied person is open to severe criticism. The traditional identification of the soul as a "substance", in today's common use of the word, can be misleading, given that in its philosophical use substance is not necessarily the same as that which can be perceived by the physical senses. Its technical definition makes this clear: "a substance is defined as whatever can significantly be said to exist separately and in its own right."⁴³ The "venerable doctrine of spiritual substance"⁴⁴, as Penelhum puts it, is based on the premise that not only does a wholly - even by definition - undetectable substance (i.e., the soul) exist, but that it survives a person's physical death, and thereby, guaranteeing his/her post-mortem identity. With Penelhum, the critics ask, How can that which possesses no "independent characterisation", that which

is a purely "metaphysical principle", possibly facilitate the continued existence of a person beyond their physical death?⁴⁵ Flew's knack for simplicity once again shines though in what he sees as the "crux" of the matter: "the adjective in the expression 'incorporeal substance' negates the identifying content of the noun."⁴⁶

In more specifically Platonists terms it could also be argued that anyone familiar with Plato's description of the eternal "forms" will certainly find it difficult to explain how, as a form itself, the soul can be used as that which ultimately differentiates individuals. Are not individual persons "particulars" or differentiated instances of the form soul rather than the other way around? As challenging as it may be, since the time of Plato thinkers have continued to find transcendent ways of approaching the problems of personhood appealing. Again, turning to what has more or less become our test case, Lewis, like many other confessing Cartesians, is quite comfortable to speak of the essential, real person not as a "soul" but in terms of a transcendent "I" notion. Although "I" and "soul" are probably considered to be on the whole equivalent by a great majority of the world's Christian population, in a formal, philosophical sense these should be differentiated. In contrast to the substantial soul, the "I" is "simply a brute and not further analysable fact"⁴⁷. This "I" actually lies at the centre of Lewis' argument, as he believes that, in seeking a solution to the ontological problem, even more important than personal memory, is the inscrutable and undeniable givenness of the I's existence:

Basically everyone knows that he is the person he is....There are certain things we do know immediately and we cannot argue further about them. and one of the obvious ones for me is my own awareness of the kind of experiences I am having and that I am having them, and this I is not something your can further describe or analyse; and...this something which I cannot describe...will survive....⁴⁸

On the surface this appeal to the "I", especially in relation to one's personal identity, seems reasonable enough. For example, in our written and oral communication we consistently refer to, or identify, ourselves as "I". However, it can be argued that no matter how convicted I am of the fact that "I am I", this in itself is not sufficient for distinguishing me from other persons, who, in most cases also possess the belief about themselves that "I am I". According to Paterson this particular transcendent method can be attacked in three ways: 1) it merely declares what the critics "doubt or deny", 2) it is a "vacuous" assertion, falsely endowing a "demonstrative pronoun" with properties which only proper names can possess, and 3) instead of filling, or bridging, the conceptual gap between the identity of pre-mortem person X and the identity of a post-mortem person purported to be that of the now physically deceased person X, invoking the "I" only records the presence of this conceptual gap.⁴⁹

Parenthetically, it is probably fair to say that this "I" relies on Cartesian presuppositions. The I's givenness is actually the givenness of the subject's awareness, or consciousness, of having experiences. Thus, Bernard Williams, can argue against Lewis' use of the "I" quite easily, stating, "you have just picked out

a feature of what it is to be conscious, not anything which picks out anybody from anybody else."⁵⁰ What is not parenthetical is the issue of having experiences as a person in a post-mortem context.

Above, we stated that the existential question asks what kinds of experiences a subject in a post-mortem world might have such that this subject could be reasonably called a person. Two presuppositions are being made here, each of which is important to our task. Firstly, the existential question presupposes that having experiences is a basic, if not necessary, aspect of being a person.⁵¹ And secondly, since having experiences means having experiences of something, that there must be some kind of "world" to which the object of experience is directly and/or indirectly related. The challenge then is to give meaningful, intelligible content to the idea of a disembodied, post-mortem person's experiences and world.

The idea that having experiences is a fundamental, if not essential, part of being a person has been touched upon in several places already. For instance, it would seem virtually impossible to ground personhood, and personal identity, on either memory or a transempirical "I"/"soul" without presupposing the primacy of experience. Does one not have to assume that memories themselves are derived from experiences and that remembering is itself a type of experience? And, in the case of the I/soul, what sense would it make to assert that the "real" person is that which underlines, owns, or is the subject of, a unique set of experiences without assuming that having experiences is

indispensable? Yet, in the context of this point, there is a contentious issue which we should recognise.

At the centre of today's survival debate is the question of whether or not consciousness continues to exist after the brain dies. Paterson states this particular problem, which anyone ascribing to post-mortem, disembodied existence must be aware of:

it is widely believed that in the complete absence of a living brain and nervous system, there can occur no conscious activity of any kind. If this belief is true, the final and irreversible cessation of brain activity will spell the complete extinction of the conscious human personality hitherto associated with the activity of that brain. The death of the brain will be the death of the person.⁵²

There are countless books available on this subject, offering a variety of viewpoints on the relationship between consciousness, mind, and the brain. However, it is not necessary to sort through all the points and counter-points on this issue, as the task at hand is to identify the criteria for the logical possibility of survival. It is therefore enough for us to say that, in order for a disembodied, post-mortem person to exist something which we would recognise as consciousness must survive the demise of the brain, for without its existence the idea of personal experiences would be unintelligible. Going one step further, it is probably prudent here to state the obvious, that beyond the concept of consciousness itself, the faculty of perception is a necessary facilitator of having experiences and being able to speak rationally of a person "having" a "world".⁵³ Thus we have come to our final topic, the nature of the "world" in which the

survivor of physical death does his/her perceiving and experiencing.

If we begin with the fact that our survivor is immaterial, we can begin to see why the problem of coming to a rational understanding of his/her "world" has been judged by many to be virtually unsolvable. On the one hand, it is extremely difficult to speak of an immaterial person being able to inhabit a place in our physical world, or, without any sense organs, to perceive it. Although many have appealed to Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) here, Flew has argued that, "where there could not be perception, there could not be 'extra-sensory perception' either".⁵⁴ On the other hand, given that our survivor would not exist in this, our pre-mortem world it is also quite a challenge to understand what the precise nature of his/her world would be, as our pre-mortem world is arguably the only world we presently have access to, and thus knowledge of.⁵⁵ One might say positively though, that those concepts which have already been described above, supporting the logical possibility of survival, could provide one with certain boundaries within which one might theorise about the survivor's, let us say, world of experiences. Offering a conceptualisation of what the disembodied survivor's world might be like, Henry Habberly Price's *Survival and the Idea of "Another World"*⁵⁶ is just such a scholarly endeavour. This is a work which in the 40 years since its publication many scholars have considered required reading for anyone investigating this issue. Yet, as respected as this work is, it remains one of a highly speculative nature,

a point which Price would readily concede. Therefore, we will only briefly review its salient features.

Price's conceptual framework is based on the assumption that without physical senses a disembodied survivor's world would have to be a world of mental images. The content of this world would be completely dependent upon the survivor's mind, e.g., his/her memories would provide this world's raw "material". In a Berkeleyan sense, the survivor's world would be "real", just as one's typically is in one's dreams. Theoretically survivors might even perceive themselves as being embodied and their environment as being "solid". However, this world would be governed by psychological rather than physical laws. Like dreams, we should expect this realm to therefore transform itself without warning, contrasting sharply with the relative continuity of our pre-mortem world, which, if a person does not perceive most of the time often relegates him/her to the world of the "insane". Price believes that the cause of such post-mortem, disembodied world changes would be the survivor's own desires. For instance, in this world of mental images, if one wanted to "go" to a certain city it would simply take place - our survivor would find him/herself immediately perceiving images of this city such that he/she would hold the belief of actually being in this city. However appealing this may sound, survivors would have to learn to cope with the fact that their worlds would be formed not only by their conscious desires, but by those which they possesses unconsciously as well.

Addressing the idea that such a world would be solipsistic, Price suggests that survivors may be able to communicate with one another, sharing their worlds,

or possibly even a single world via ESP. Envisioning an extension of such capacities, our survivors may even be able to interact in much the same way as we do, e.g., with the abilities to see, hear, smell, and experience each other tactily as well. This is the point at which many sympathetic to Price's theory world tend to draw the line, understandably finding the notion of a shared, mind-dependent world internally inconsistent and rationally acceptable. Already alluded to above, if such interaction were permitted the memory criterion, as a sufficient condition for asserting personal identity, would be much less problematic. Those who reason along these lines believe that survivors' memories may be verifiable by other survivors with whom they would interact. Thus, precisely because they share the same world, survivors' memories might get the personhood-establishing stamp of approval, as they would conceivably be grounded on what we called above, "publicly available evidence". Here we can see that if one were to accept the viability of Price's world, one would first have to accept, this, his solution to the epistemological question, i.e., a shared mind-dependent image-world theory. Yet, before one could do that one would have to assent to a dualistic understanding of personhood, without which even the idea of a person surviving as a "mind" would not be possible. Hence, the more comprehensive critique of this attempt to address specifically what we have identified as the existential question, in relation to the logical possibility of survival, is to reject Price's own dualistic understanding of a human being.

4.0 Summary

"I really look forward to meeting all my dear friends who have past away. Yes indeed, NDErs have been able to tell us a great deal about what's really going to happen when we die."

"Don't be so foolish, it can't do that, but that's what Satan would like you to think."

"Given that we don't know for sure whether these people really died or not, I don't completely agree with either of you. I do think that the NDE provides us with a rare opportunity to understand the deeper, spiritual significance which death has for the human race."

"I'm afraid all three of you are being a bit naive. These people had to be alive to tell their story, right? Isn't it plain that they simply didn't die; that these wild stories - about leaving the body and meeting God and finding heaven - are the delusional products of minds distorted by great stress?"

The conversation which these imaginary people are having represents the boundaries within which the NDE has been explored by theologians to-date. If we were to continue listening we would no doubt find that none of our "theologians" seem to seriously consider if they even have been asking the right questions. In expressing one of the three groups distinguished above - that the NDE is 1) a literal experience of death, 2) a symbolic death experience, or 3) a psychologically, physiologically, and/or pharmacologically based delusion - all of these people have assumed that the most important theological issues at stake are either eschatological or pareschatological. It has been

proposed that in order to investigate this pigeon-holing of the NDE, we should first compare the actual NDE research data with those concepts which would make the survival of physical death a logical possibility. Thus, we are now in a position to propose that the extent to which the NDE can be par/eschatologically contextualized will be partially determined by the extent to which it corresponds with the conceptualization of the logical possibility of surviving physical death in Platonic-Cartesian terms. These can be summarised as follows.

In the first place, a dualistic notion of human being is necessary, such that 1) the pre-mortem person is a composite being, i.e., made up of a physical body and an incorporeal mind, or soul, or self, etc., and 2) the incorporeal part of the person is actually the "real" person. In order to understand what is meant by the claim that this incorporeal surviving entity is a "person" (the ontological question) scholars have appealed to psychological and transcendent concepts. In the case of the former, the disembodied person has been identified with his/her pre-mortem memories and/or unique set of personality traits/characteristics. If it were somehow possible for the survivor's memories to be externally verified (addressing the epistemological issue) this solution would become greatly strengthened. When the survivor is described in transcendent terms, he/she is identified (thus addressing the epistemological question) as the "owner" or subject of a unique set of experiences. Here, the presence of consciousness is vital for asserting 1) the incorporeal substance of the thinking "soul"/"mind", and, 2) arguably, what some describe as the given, un-analyzable

"I". As we have seen above, both the psychological and the transcendent ways of conceiving disembodied, post-mortem personal identity presuppose the primacy of our survivor having experiences. From this we recognised that although an accurate description of the survivor's "world" is practically impossible - since, strictly speaking, he/she can not exist in ours and we can have no knowledge his/hers - one might construct a rationally based theory of what it might be like if one were to remain within the conceptual boundaries established by previously answering the ontological and epistemological questions. Thus, in considering Price's attempt to do this, we were presented with a mind-dependent image world, in which the survivor's memories provided the "material" and his/her desires its form. Indeed, Price's post-mortem world of experiences seemed to be consistent with a number of survival-friendly concepts already discussed. However, we saw that there was at least one, major inconsistency in his reasoning, which, in allowing such worlds to be shared among survivors, enabled Price to go a long way in overcoming the epistemological problem. This takes us back to the beginning of this whole consideration of the disembodied existence of a survivor of physical death, recognising that at the heart of any such concept lies the ontological question, What is a person?

For us the immediate interest is in the...question whether any sort of NDEs do or would support, as the Badhams clearly believe, a Platonic-Cartesian view of the nature of man. It is only if that is answered in the affirmative that there arises, as here logically secondary, the question whether they do or would constitute evidence for survival.⁵⁷

Having established what the crucial philosophical concepts are for the task at hand, we need now to ascertain the precise nature of the NDE's content in order to make an informed, critical comparison. Hence, in the next two chapters we will focus on constructing a comprehensive NDE typology, based on the most reliable research done on the NDE itself to date.

ENDNOTES

¹ Perry, M.P. (1979) Book review of "To die is gain" by Hampe, J.C., *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 3 (4), 145-147.

² Hare Duke, M. (1993) Book review of "Transformed by the light" by Morse, M., and Perry, P., *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 10 (1), 28-29.

³ "...if there is life after death there may be a better possibility of picturing its more proximate than its more ultimate phases. It will therefore be useful to distinguish between pareschatologies and eschatologies. Whereas eschatology is the doctrine of the eschata or last things, and thus of the ultimate state of man, Pareschatology is, by analogy, the doctrine of the para-eschata, or next-to-last things, and thus of the human future between the present life and man's ultimate state....For if there is continued human existence after bodily death it is possible that its more immediate phases may bear sufficient analogy to our present state....But there are reasons...to suppose that no mode of existence analogous to our present life could continue for ever, through unlimited time." Hick J. (1994 edition) *Death and eternal life*. Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville Kentucky, 22.

⁴ For instance two of the most popular and successful films specifically about death in recent times, *Ghost* and *Flatliners*, have been based directly on the NDE. (Schumacher, J. [Director] [1990] *Flatliners* [film]. Columbia, Hollywood and Zucker, J. [Director] [1990] *Ghost* [film]. Paramount, Hollywood).

⁵ Hunter, E.G. (1987) The apostle Paul and the near-death experience. *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 7 (2), 44-46. At the time of writing this article Hunter was senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church, Santa Ana, California.

⁶ Badham, P., and Badham L. (1984) *Immortality or extinction?*. S.P.C.K., London, 89. After nine more years of contact with NDE research and reflection Paul Badham has maintained this position. (see, Badham, P. (1993) The Christian hope and parapsychology's research. *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 10 (1), 2-11).

⁷ Perry, M.P. (1984) *Psychic studies: a Christian's view*. The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northhamshire, 106. Perry was the Archdeacon of Durham in the Church of England when he wrote this.

⁸ Ibid, 35. Outside of scholarly NDE treatments are a great many popular publications which use the NDE in a similar manner. Characteristically these advance more or less detailed explanations of various eschatological phenomena grounded on NDEs. In particular, the current "New Age" genre of literature offers many examples of this. See, Walter, T. (1993) *Death in the new-age. Religion*, 23 (2), 127-145, for a concise discussion of this growing trend.

⁹ For a good example of this kind of NDE interpretation see, Levitt, J., and Weldon, Z. (1978) *Is there life after death?*. Kingsway publications, Eastbourne. For a similar suggestion, that some NDEs are demonically caused see, Rawlings, M. (1978) *Beyond death's door*. Thomas Nelson, Nashville.

¹⁰ Heaney J.J. (1984) *The sacred and the psychic, parapsychology and Christian theology*. Paulist Press, New York. Another good example of this type of position can be found written eight years before Heaney's, i.e., Kelsey, M. T. (1976) *The Christian and the supernatural*. Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis. Carl B. Becker offers a good example of this perspective from a non-Christian orientation: Becker, C. (1981) The centrality of near-death experiences in Chinese Pure Land Buddhism. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 1, 154-171; (1984) The pure land revisited: sino-Japanese meditations and near-death experiences of the next world. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 4 (1), 51-68; and (1985) Views from Tibet: NDEs and the Book of the Dead. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 5 (1), 3-20.

¹¹ Zaleski, 187. See also Mickel, H.A. (1991) A critique of Kellehear's transcendent society. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 10 (2), 123-130, which takes quite a similar approach, viewing the NDE as a kind of visionary experience or otherworld journey taking place on the "brink of death".

¹² Küng, H. (1984) *Eternal life?*. translated by Quinn, E., Collins, London, 29-35. In the preface of the 1985 reissue of John Hick's classic *Death and Eternal Life*, he

too takes this position: "Since the patients have proved capable of being resuscitated, we know that they were not completely dead. Was their experience, then, a vivid dream produced by a brain that is losing oxygen; or a psychological act of self-reassurance in face of impending extinction; or was it the first authentic glimpse of a post-mortem mode of consciousness, or at least of the interface between this life and another? It may be that future research will be able either to confirm or to rule out the various natural possibilities. But in the meantime death retains its ancient aspect of mystery." (Hick J. (1985) *Death and eternal life*. Macmillan Press LTD, London, preface, 10).

¹³ Habgood, J. (1994) Book review of "Otherworld journeys: accounts of near-death experiences in medieval and modern times" by Zaleski, C., *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 10 (6), 207-208.

¹⁴ Penelhum, T. (1980) *Survival and disembodied existence*. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. (First published in 1970), 17-18.

¹⁵ Paterson, R.W.K. (1995) *Philosophy and the belief in a life after death*. Macmillian Press LTD, 4.

¹⁶ The doctrine of the second coming of Christ, and others like it which enable many to claim that not all persons will necessarily suffer physical death on supernatural grounds, are here not taken into consideration.

¹⁷ Penelhum, 1.

¹⁸ Flew, A. (1976) *The Presumption of Atheism and Other Philosophical Essays on God, Freedom, and Immortality*. Elek/Pemberton, London, 104-106.

¹⁹ Ibid, 108; Penelhum, 4-5.

²⁰ Paterson, 72-73; See also Penelhum, 3-4, 93-102.

²¹ Flew, 105-106.

²² See Flew, 117-118; Penelhum, 104-106; and Lewis, H.D. (1978) *Persons and life after death: Essays by Hywel D. Lewis and some of his critics*. The Macmillan Press LTD., 82-84.

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- ²³ Flew, 105.
- ²⁴ Paterson, 21.
- ²⁵ Lewis, 89 (*Italic mine*).
- ²⁶ Flew, A. (1987) *The logic of mortality*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 118.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 118 and 99.
- ²⁸ See Penelhum, 54.
- ²⁹ Paterson, 35-38.
- ³⁰ Berger, A (1995) "Death and the afterlife: new approaches to an old question", Chapter 11 (137-144) in *Beyond death theological and philosophical reflections on life after death*. Edited by Cohn-Sherbok, D, and Lewis, C. Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 139.
- ³¹ Ibid, 141-143.
- ³² Lewis, 87.
- ³³ "...one should really think it self-evident, that consciousness of personal identity presupposes, and therefore cannot constitute personal identity; any more than knowledge, in any other case, can constitute truth, which it presupposes". (Butler, J [1897] *The works of Joseph Butler, D.C.L. volume one*. edited by Gladstone, W.E., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 318).
- ³⁴ Lewis, 87.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 86.
- ³⁶ Paterson, 35, 37-38.
- ³⁷ Hume, D. (1739-40) *Treaties of human nature*. edited by L.A. Selby-Bigg, revised by P.H. Nidditch. Clarendon, Oxford (second edition 1978).
- ³⁸ See Flew (1987), 136-163.
- ³⁹ Paterson, 38-40.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 38.

⁴¹ See Flew's comments on Plato's *The Republic* and *Phaedo* in Lewis, 96.

⁴² Badham, P. (1976) *Christian beliefs about life after death*. The Macmillan Press LTD, London, 99.

⁴³ Flew (1976), 141.

⁴⁴ Penelhum, 76.

⁴⁵ Ibid. See also, Paterson, 38-40; Flew (1976) 117, 135-137, 141-147.

⁴⁶ Flew (1976) 147.

⁴⁷ Paterson, 40.

⁴⁸ Lewis, 64. Stating this idea in more general terms Lewis puts it this way "Each one knows who he is in being himself...though ...no description of the self, in this basic sense, which distinguishes it from others and identifies it, is possible." (Lewis, 86). In defense of this position Lewis states that it does not necessitate a "non-philosophical brute acceptance", yet he qualifies his refusal to explain precisely what the "I" is by calling it an "ultimate". The reader must reconcile this with Lewis' full analysis of the situation, an analysis which, in the opinion of this author, does indeed rest on an unwillingness to develop/explain the implications of positing this "I". It would be difficult to show that Lewis' "I" is not based on the following from his own presentation of this idea: "...there is what I am almost tempted to call the brute fact that I am having these thoughts. That is an ultimate of which no further account appears possible" (Lewis, 30).

⁴⁹ Paterson, 40.

⁵⁰ Barnard Williams in, Lewis, H.D. (1978) *Persons and life after death: Essays by Hywel D. Lewis and some of his critics*. The Macmillan Press LTD, 65.

⁵¹ For example see Flew (1976) 120-211; Penelhum, 23-24; Badham (1976) 133.

⁵² Paterson, 59

⁵³ See Penelhum 23.

⁵⁴ His argument is largely founded on the idea that the identification of such phenomena/capacities is dependent on "subsequent sensory check-ups" - without recourse to some non-subjective evidence, i.e., that available via the physically based senses, the disembodied person could never discern between his/her purely subject, mental images and perceptions of the physical world. See Flew (1987) 180-183.

⁵⁵ See Penelhum, 45-46.

⁵⁶ Price, H.H. Survival and the Idea of "Another World" in (ed) Smythies, J.R. (1965) *Brain and Mind*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. (This article was first published in the *Proceedings of the SPR*, Vol 50, 182, 1953).

⁵⁷ Flew (1987) 178.

CHAPTER TWO
THE NDE RESEARCHERS AND THEIR STUDIES

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter we will take a detailed look into the ten primary NDE studies from which a typological profile of the NDE will be produced in the next chapter. The aim of the first section is to answer four questions for each one of these NDE investigations:

1. Who are the researchers?
2. What was the stated purpose for conducting the study?
3. What methodology was used?
4. What demographic features characterised the study population?

By comparing this information we will be able to determine the extent to which, beyond meeting all six of the following inclusion criteria, this group is actually homogeneous.

1. The NDE itself had to be the primary focus of the study or a major sub-topic of a larger study.
2. The study had to focus strongly on the *phenomenology* of the NDE (e.g. solely interpretative and explanatory treatments of the NDE were not included).
3. The study population had to be relatively large (i.e. 25 or more persons).

4. The study and its results had to be based exclusively on data originating from persons specifically gathered by, and for, the same piece of research.

5. Quantitative data had to be collected and presented.¹

6. The NDE phenomenon had to be treated in its entirety (i.e. studies focusing only on a single or a few of the various, generally accepted, NDE characteristics were not included).

Introduced in the second section are the descriptive categories and basic quantitative findings for all of the studies. However, this data is not meant to be exhaustive; more detailed information will be provided in each section in the next chapter. Essentially the information given is that which grounds the general categorisations specified by the particular piece of research.

2.0 The Researchers: Purpose, Population, & Methodology

2.1. Moody

Beginning with the father of modern-day NDE studies we find that Moody's stated purpose in pursuing near-death studies was to answer the question, descriptively, "What is it like to die?".² Ultimately Moody's *Life After Death* was written based on the cases of 50 persons who experienced, or at least reported having had experienced, some type of unusual phenomenon during a close brush with "death" even though "unconscious" at the time. Each case included detailed information taken from an in-depth interview with a person living in the U.S.A., all of whom told Moody about

their experiences either because they knew of his interest in the life after death question - and his subsequent collection of NDE accounts - or they were referred to him by someone else who knew of his interest.

Demographics for the entire study population are not given, yet both male and female accounts are cited. Of the more than 90 excerpts Moody provides from his NDErs' accounts there are only four in which the experient is a child (under the age of 18 years), suggesting that no more than 5% of his experients were children at the time of their NDEs. To be included in the study subjects had to fit into one of two categories;

- 1) The experiences of persons who were resuscitated after having been thought, adjudged, or pronounced clinically dead by their doctors.
- 2) The experiences of persons who, in the course of accidents or severe injury or illness, came very close to physical death.³

Experients' claims of encountering death were investigated by consulting their 1) medical records or, if these were not available, 2) friends, doctors or relatives. Moody reached the conclusion that in all cases, where such methods of confirmation were possible, the near-death event did take place as reported by the subjects.⁴ He presents his data in a purely descriptive fashion, offering anecdotal information in order to illustrate what he identified as the 15 separate, consistently recurring elements of the NDE⁵

The fundamental observations made in this largely qualitative presentation of the NDE have been substantiated by most, if not all, of the major studies done on the subject since *Life After Life* was published. Not only has *Life After Life* almost single-handedly inspired the

majority of NDE research projects, but a great deal of its terminology and phenomenological categorisation have become standards in the field. Therefore, in the light of its seminal status, *Life After Life's* lack of quantitative data was not considered sufficient grounds for excluding it as one of only a handful of primary NDE studies which were able to meet the stated inclusion criteria for this thesis.

2.2. Hampe

Apparently unknown to most, if not all, early NDE researchers, a Lutheran minister in Germany, Johann Christoph Hampe, had been recording and analysing near-death and deathbed accounts at the same time as Moody. In 1975 he also published his findings in a book entitled *Sterben ist doch ganz anders*; translated it became, *To Die is Gain; The Experience of One's Own Death*.⁶ Inspired by his own survival of clinical death, Hampe's purpose in writing this book was to put life and death into a new perspective by offering accounts of what reportedly takes place "between life and death".⁷ In contrast to Moody's somewhat apologetic comment at the end of *Life After Life* that "I would like to say to scientifically-minded readers that I am fully aware that what I have done here does not constitute a scientific study"⁸, Hampe tells the reader in his preface that he/she is about to enter a "field where statistics...are useless and our usual ways of acquiring knowledge take us nowhere".⁹ His presentation of the NDE relies heavily upon illustrations of the various NDE phenomena making up the accounts themselves. These are offered within the context of three major categories which are descriptive of the NDE: 1) the "exit of the self", 2) the "life panorama", and 3) the "expansion of the self".¹⁰

Hampe's study population consisted of approximately 40 "people who were brought back to life although they were actually dying, and who were able to tell us what they experienced between life and death."¹¹ According to him these persons were actually "in a state of coma" at the time of their experience.¹² As far as what triggered these near-death events the testimonies evidence a wide range of circumstances (e.g. illnesses and accidents), while for many cases such information is not provided. This points to the most limiting factor of this work - personal interviews played a very small role in Hampe's methodology. His primary sources of data included contemporary and past near-death accounts - from predominantly European persons - as found in various publications. Although, a number of cases were personally related to him by the experiencers themselves. Both male and female experiences are offered, yet no specific information is given from which one could ascertain the number of each. The same is true for the study population's age range, however it is not difficult to figure out that in the vast majority of cases experiencers were adults at the time of their NDEs.

2.3. Ring

Five years after the release of *Life After Life* and *To Die is Gain* the psychologist Kenneth Ring published a book which continues to be a significant standard and touchstone from which a great deal of modern near-death researchers undertake and compare, respectively, their work. Initially inspired by both the reading of Moody's *Life After Life* and a previous interest in "altered states of consciousness", Ring states that his reason for studying the NDE was to "find out what people experience when they are on the verge

of apparent imminent death". More specifically, as a psychologist, Ring's purpose was to conduct the first piece of NDE research from a "scientific point of view" in the hope of making "real headway in our understanding of near-death phenomena".¹³

Indeed, *Life at Death* is distinguished by its rigorous methodology. The subjects had to meet the criteria of having been 1) "close to death" or "resuscitated from clinical death, as a result of a serious illness, accident, or suicide attempt"; 2) recovered enough to discuss the experience "coherently"; 3) fluent enough in English for the interview to be conducted properly; and 4) at least 18 years of age.¹⁴ Whether or not a subject was actually "close to death" was determined by a review of 1) the experient's own statements, 2) information provided by "physicians or other medical personnel, or from spouses or friends", and/or 3) from the experient's medical records. This review was done for each person by at least three, and sometimes five, persons assisting Ring with the study.¹⁵ All the subjects included in this project were from the states of Connecticut and Maine in the U.S.A., having been obtained by referrals from hospital staff¹⁶ (54 persons), nonmedical persons (16), doctors (5 persons), self-referrals by persons learning of the study (6 persons), and responses to letters sent to psychiatrists and advertising in local newspapers (21 persons).¹⁷ A highly structured, tape-recorded interview was used to collect the raw data from the 102 subjects. Each interview yielded 1) demographic information; 2) a "free narrative of the near-death episode"; 3) answers to questions asked in order to determine if "various components of the core experience as described by Moody (1975)" were present; and 4) a "pre- and post-incident comparison of religious beliefs and

attitudes".¹⁸ Applying a measurement called the Weighted Core Experience Index¹⁹ (WCEI) Ring then evaluated each experient's NDE data in detail.

This WCEI was developed by Ring in order to measure the "depth" of the subject's experience. Using the "principal features of the core experience" as reported by Moody in *Life After Life*, Ring rated the NDE data using a 10 "component" index. Although these components were weighted in a "slightly arbitrary" fashion Ring states that they were chosen prior to the analysis of the data. The components and corresponding weights of the WCEI are shown below in Table I.

Table I:
Components and Weights of Ring's WCEI

<u>Component</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Subjective sense of being dead	1
Feelings of peace, painlessness, pleasantness	2
Sense of bodily separation	2
Sense of entering a dark region	2
Encountering a presence/hearing a voice	3
Taking stock of one's life	3
Seeing, or being enveloped in, light	2
Seeing beautiful colors	1
Entering into the light	4
Encountering visible "spirits"	3 ²⁰

Thus, it was determined that 27 (26%) of the respondents were "deep experiencers"; 22 (22%) "moderate experiencers"; and 53 (52%) "non-experiencers".²¹ Ring identifies "core experiencers" as those having a Moody-type NDE, i.e., all those classified as either deep or moderate experiencers (48%).²² Besides for the WCEI analysis Ring presented his NDE data by providing illustrations from his experients' accounts, organised within the context of the "five distinct stages of the core experience".²³

Demographically speaking 45 of Ring's subjects were male and 57 female, while ages ranged from 18 to 84 years with a mean age of 37.81 at the time of the near-death

incident. Of the 104 "near-death incidents" recorded 50% were caused by serious illness, 25% by accidents, and 25% by failed suicide attempts.²⁴

2.4. Greyson and Stevenson

Less than five months after the publication of *Life at Death* Bruce Greyson and Ian Stevenson, both psychiatrists, published the article "The Phenomenology of Near-Death Experiences" in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.²⁵ Their purpose in undertaking their research was to "describe the characteristic features" of the NDE.²⁶ In order to accomplish this they used a total of 78 NDE accounts. Their subjects varied widely in age at the time of their NDEs: 27% were 18 years of age or younger, 32% were 19 to 35 years old, and 40% were beyond 35 years of age. In terms of gender 63% were female and 37% male.²⁷ The only criterion for inclusion in the study was that the subject volunteer as a self-described NDEr.²⁸ This being the case, Greyson and Stevenson made sure to acquire as much information as possible about each subject's experience. They reported that in 80% of their cases medical personnel were present either during or immediately after experients' NDEs. This seems reasonable given that 40% of the cases involved medical illness, 37% traumatic injury, 13% surgical operations, 7% childbirth, and 4% "drug ingestion". Forty-one percent of the respondents said that they were considered dead during their NDEs, 41% had an NDE corresponding to some degree of physical injury, while 18% had their close brush with death without having any physical injury at all.²⁹

The 78 subjects were attained in three ways: 1) 18 from letters received in response to an NDE article in a

national (U.S.A.) magazine, 2) 22 from responses to announcements in professional newsletters and magazines specialising in "popular articles about parapsychological phenomena", and 3) 38 from persons who knew about the work of Stevenson in the area of death studies.³⁰ The method employed in gathering data for these retrospective cases³¹ included 1) the use of a first-hand written or tape recorded account from the respondent, 2) the completion of a detailed questionnaire, 3) a personal interview, and, whenever possible, 4) the examination of relevant medical records. After these steps were taken a list of NDE related characteristics was made for each person. Frequencies for these items were then determined and "certain cross-tabulations" - chosen because of their relevance to the researchers' "explanatory hypotheses" - were evaluated using chi-squared tests.³² Generally speaking, Greyson and Stevenson provide detailed information on approximately 14 separate characteristic features of the NDE.³³

2.5. Lindley, Bryan and Conley

One year later, in 1981, James Lindley, Sethyn Bryan, and Bob Conley - all researchers at Evergreen State College in the state of Washington, U.S.A. - published a study which was conducted using much of Ring's methodology.³⁴ Their primary purpose was to investigate the near-death experience via the collection of data from persons who had "been in a life-threatening situation and felt...(they) had actually died".³⁵ The expressed intention was to do this as scientifically and objectively as possible, with a conscious effort of keeping free from the "assumptions and interpretations suggested by some (NDE) researchers and

experiencers".³⁶ The means used to achieve this goal included a tape recorded interview with each subject encompassing 1) each person's uninterrupted, account of his/her experience, 2) answers given in response to Ring's standard questions, as published in *Life at Death*, and 3) general demographic information. In addition, Ring's WCEI was used to "isolate and evaluate specific qualities of the experience".³⁷

Through advertisements in the popular media (35 subjects) and by word of mouth referrals (14 subjects) a total of 49 persons from the Pacific Northwest region of the United States were obtained for the study, all of whom reported either having been "clinically dead" or having had "died and returned to life". Subjects recounted a total of 55 experiences³⁸, 50 of which were determined, via Ring's WCEI, to be NDEs.³⁹ These 50 were triggered by 36 accidents, 12 illnesses, and 2 suicide attempts.⁴⁰ In terms of gender 31 (62%) NDErs were women and 19 (38%) men. Unfortunately these researchers provide no specific information concerning their subjects' ages.⁴¹ The bulk of the findings consist of representative excerpts from experiencers' accounts, organised within the context of Ring's five NDE stages.⁴²

2.6. Sabom

In 1982 cardiologist Michael Sabom published the results of his NDE research in *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation*.⁴³ After reading Moody's *Life After Life* Sabom decided to undertake a "scientific study" of the subject, since he found many of Moody's claims both hard to believe and not supported by a scientific methodology.⁴⁴ He acquired his study population over a five year period

within the South-eastern region of the United States. Seventy-eight subjects were obtained in a prospective fashion⁴⁵ by Sabom and his colleague Susan Kreutziger⁴⁶ at the hospitals in which they worked.⁴⁷ Unlike the major NDE studies conducted previously Sabom's had a distinct advantage in that he and Kreutziger themselves had been directly involved with either the "treatment" or "counselling" of all 78 subjects⁴⁸ from which their primary data was obtained. Thirty-eight additional cases were acquired via referrals provided by medical personnel familiar with the study or as a result of Sabom and Kreutziger's presentations about the NDE given at local churches and civic groups. The information obtained from these subjects was combined with that from the original seventy-eight in order to more fully study and describe the various NDE characteristics.⁴⁹

Thus, this study consisted of 116 "hospital patients",⁵⁰ of which 106 experienced a "near-death crisis event as an episode of unconsciousness associated with physical death".⁵¹ Such was the criteria applied to each case in an effort to determine whether or not a respondent should become part of the study.⁵² The definition Sabom gives for "near-death crisis event" is "any illness or episode by which the patient had been rendered unconscious and physically near death"⁵³, where "near-death" was defined as "extreme physiological catastrophe, accidental or otherwise, that would reasonably be expected to result in irreversible biological death...and would demand urgent medical attention".⁵⁴ Hence, Sabom's methodology included reviewing each experient's medical records.⁵⁵

Sabom too made use of a standardised interview, in which no mention was made of NDEs. If the subject did begin to relate some type of "experience (which they had)

while unconscious" the remainder of the interview was tape recorded. In fact, this - the subject's memory of an experience while unconscious - was the only criterion Sabom used to determine who was and who was not labelled a "NDER". After the full account was given by the experient, specific questions were asked for the sake of clarification. The collected data was then evaluated and organised according to ten NDE "elements" derived from Moody's descriptions in *Life After Life*.⁵⁶ Sabom reports that of his 106 non-surgical cases 61 were NDErs and 45 non-NDErs.⁵⁷

Of the primary study population - 78 non-surgical⁵⁸, prospective cases - cardiac arrest was the near-death crisis event for 26 NDErs and 40 non-NDErs, coma accounted for 5 NDErs and 3 non-NDErs, while 2 NDErs and 2 non-NDErs reported accidents.⁵⁹ The mean age, at the time of the interview, of the NDErs was 49 years and 53 for the non-NDErs. The subjects' gender profile consisted of 26 male and 7 female NDErs, and 7 female and 38 male non-NDErs.⁶⁰

2.7. Gallup

Beginning in early 1980 and continuing for about a year and a half a "series of national surveys" were conducted by the national Gallup polling organisation. The aim of George Gallup and his colleagues was to find out what the attitudes and beliefs were about issues relating to "immortality" in the United States.⁶¹ These involved one-thousand and five-hundred persons, all over the age of 18 years, scientifically selected to represent the entire population. The results were then correlated with a variety of personal demographic information.⁶² The primary NDE question which was posed inquired "Have you, yourself,

ever been on the verge of death or had a 'close call' which involved any unusual experiences at that time?"⁶³ The 225 (15%) individuals who responded affirmatively to this were then given a follow-up questionnaire which called for "open-ended, detailed descriptions of any sort of unusual or 'mystical' encounter" they might have remembered having had during their verge of death experiences. It was subsequently determined that, of the 225, 79 (5%) had had an NDE.⁶⁴ The causes, or triggers, of these encounters "at death's door" included 1) physical accidents, 2) childbirth, 3) "hospital operations and other illnesses involving drugs or anaesthetics", and 4) sudden illnesses outside of hospitals.⁶⁵

Although there was no attempt made to find out from the respondents themselves whether their experiences were actually triggered by "brain death" or "merely a close call with death where bodily functions were still operating", Gallup did take his respondents' testimonies, questionnaires and interviews to "experts in various specialised fields" in order to obtain a related assessment of the data.⁶⁶ Projecting his results, Gallup determined that 15% of the population had had a "verge-of-death or temporary death experience" ("about 23 million people"), and of these 35% ("about 8 million") "have experienced some sort of mystical encounter along with the death event", i.e., an NDE.⁶⁷ As for his presentation and analysis of the near-death phenomena, Gallup's treatment was largely descriptive; the experiencers' accounts were used liberally, particularly in the form of their comparison and contrast with 1) traditional Christian concepts and 2) related findings from previous national polls.

2.8. Green and Friedman



Timothy Green and Penelope Friedman, students of psychology at California State University, placed an advertisement in several Los Angeles area newspapers in January of 1981 calling for interviews with persons who had "been close to death or clinically dead".⁶⁸ Ultimately this study population also consisted of referrals, representing 30% of the group. In total Green accumulated 50 instances of NDEs from interviews with 41 respondents, all of whom were from the greater Los Angeles area.⁶⁹ He had set out to get interviews from people who claimed to be NDErs,⁷⁰ with the stated purpose of attempting "to replicate the results" of the NDE research conducted by Moody, Ring, Sabom, and Lindley.⁷¹

Fifteen of his 41 subjects were men and 26 women, with an age range of 18 to 67 years and a mean age of 29 at the time of their NDEs.⁷² Twenty-four of the respondents came close to death as a result of an illness, 22 because of an accident, and 4 had attempted suicide.⁷³ Besides for being a self-described NDEr each subject had to 1) be 18 years of age or older at the time of the interview, 2) have been "near death or clinically dead as the result of accident, illness or suicide attempt", and 3) have been "sufficiently" recovered to be interviewed. Because this project was concerned with finding only those persons who had had an NDE, potential participants were immediately eliminated from the study if they did not initially report encountering any of the phenomena "commonly associated with the NDE".⁷⁴

After all those respondents that were not NDErs were screened out, information was gathered via recorded and transcribed interviews, which were based on the one used by Ring in his 1980 study. Final statistical results were

produced using Ring's WCEI⁷⁵, revealing that 33 (66%) accounts rated as "deep" NDEs, 10 (20%) as "moderate" NDEs and 7 (14%) as experiences which did not represent an NDE (i.e., non-NDEs).⁷⁶ Much like the previous piece of research this NDE project presented its findings using NDErs' quotes in the context of Ring's 5 NDE stages.⁷⁷ It was concluded that the results obtained did indeed mirror those reported by Moody, Ring, Sabom, and Lindley.

2.9. Grey

The British, humanist psychologist⁷⁸ Margot Grey - inspired by the experience of an NDE herself - began her 18 month long collection of data in early 1981.⁷⁹ Her goal was to conduct a major, comparative, and cross-cultural study with Ring's, thus accounting for her stated objective to "model" his methodology. Although comparative in design Grey's study is rather unique, for she also set out to ground it specifically on "observations of the *humanistic* features involved" in the NDE.⁸⁰

Grey set about finding subjects by asking for referrals from those most likely to be in direct contact with persons experiencing a close brush with death. She simply informed them that she would like to interview people who had actually been "resuscitated from clinical death" or "felt that they had died and returned to life".⁸¹ Consequently, she gathered together each experient's "case history material" as a result of referrals from "colleagues, friends and acquaintances", and "other professional contacts" (e.g. "physicians, nurses, clergymen, and various staff members of a number of large hospitals").⁸² In contrast, Grey selected her American NDErs from case histories located in the archives of the

International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), choosing only those who were self-described NDErs.⁸³ In total Grey included 41 persons in her study: 32 British citizens and 9 American⁸⁴, of which 16 were men and 25 women.⁸⁵ The different types of "near-death onset" consisted of 29 illnesses, 9 accidents and 3 suicide attempts. While no data was provided pertaining to age, from an analysis of the testimonies presented it seems highly probable that all of Grey's subjects were adults at the time of their experiences.

Following Ring's example, Grey employed a structured interview schedule to collect her data. This tape recorded interview consisted of 1) a collection of personal information, 2) a "free narrative" of the NDE itself, 3) questions intended to ascertain the manifestation of a number of NDE "components", and 4) questions addressing the after-effects of the experience.⁸⁶ The results were then statistically depicted and descriptively compared with Ring's 5 NDE stages.⁸⁷ Grey determined that of her 41 subjects 38 (92.6%) were "core experiences" and 3 "non-experiencers".⁸⁸

2.10. Greyson

The primary purpose of psychiatrist Bruce Greyson's study, entitled "Near-Death Encounters With and Without Near-Death Experiences: Comparative NDE Scale Profiles" was to investigate what, if any, differences there were between the perceived experiences of those reporting NDEs at the time of their near-death encounters and those not reporting NDEs at the time of their near-death encounters.⁸⁹ He obtained his subjects via responses to advertisements in the IANDS newsletter.⁹⁰ From these responses - presumably

all from the United States - 183 persons maintained that they had had an NDE and 63 people that they had not.⁹¹ One-hundred and fourteen of the 183 NDErs were female and 69 male, with a mean age - at time of near-death event - of 32.5 years. Of the 63 non-NDErs, 29 were male and 34 female, with a mean age of 30.5 years.⁹²

Greyson's methodology relied heavily on the administration of a "16 item multiple choice NDE Scale", which he had developed in the hopes of establishing an accurate set of criteria with which to measure both the occurrence and extent of NDEs.⁹³ More precisely, this NDE Scale was meant to function as a quantifier of the NDE and its "Cognitive, Affective, Paranormal, and Transcendental Components".⁹⁴ Greyson created this instrument by first contacting 67 persons from among the members of IANDS, who reported a total of 74 NDEs. From these 74 accounts he produced a list of 80 "manifestations" of NDE phenomena from which were selected 33 which were most commonly reported. It was from these that Greyson constructed a "33-item scaled-response preliminary questionnaire", which was then sent to the original 67 NDErs. Two months after having completed this questionnaire, Greyson administered the questionnaire again to the first 50 persons in order to assess its "test-retest reliability".⁹⁵ He arrived at the final 16 item NDE Scale by using a variety of measurements to determine "significant item-total score correlations that could be grouped into clinically meaningful clusters."⁹⁶ The final NDE Scale questionnaire took the following form:

Table II:
Greyson's NDE Scale Questionnaire

Cognitive

1. Did time seem to speed up?
2. Were your thoughts speeded up?
3. Did scenes from your past come back to you?
4. Did you suddenly seem to understand everything?

Affective

5. Did you have a feeling of peace or pleasantness?
6. Did you have a feeling of joy?
7. Did you feel a sense of harmony or unity with the universe?
8. Did you see or feel surrounded by a brilliant light?

Paranormal

9. Were your senses more vivid than usual?
10. Did you seem to be aware of things going on elsewhere, as if by ESP?
11. Did scenes from the future come to you?
12. Did you feel separated from your physical body?

Transcendental

13. Did you seem to enter some other, unearthly world?
14. Did you seem to encounter a mystical being or presence?
15. Did you see deceased spirits or religious figures?
16. Did you come to a border or point of no return?⁹⁷

The respondents had three answers to choose from for each question; one representing a strong affirmation of the known NDE phenomena, one a moderate affirmation of the NDE, and the third which would clearly indicate the absence of the relevant, known NDE phenomenon. Quantitatively, the NDE Scale has a possible high score of 32 and a low of 0; Greyson's NDErs scored from 2 to 31, with a mean score of 15.01 ± 7.84 . The same group produced mean scores in the four "clusters" as follows: 2.35 ± 2.51 for the Cognitive Component, 5.50 ± 2.67 for the Affective, 3.31 ± 2.30 for the Paranormal, and 3.85 ± 2.67 for the Transcendental.⁹⁸ Using various data and measurements Greyson found that his NDE Scale was both reliable and valid.⁹⁹

Returning to Greyson's 1990 comparative study as described above, from the questionnaires that were completed and mailed back to him he found that 169 (92%) of

the 183 persons claiming to have had an NDE scored as NDErs. Interestingly 18 (29%) of the 63 persons who claimed not to have had an NDE also scored as NDErs.¹⁰⁰ Sixty-one (33%) of the 183 self-described NDErs were classified as Cognitive NDErs, 42 (23%) as Affective NDErs, 5 (3%) as Paranormal NDErs, and 43 (18%) gave accounts that failed to satisfy the criteria for inclusion in any one of the NDE Scale cluster groups. As for the subjects who claimed that they did not experience an NDE at the time of their near-death episodes 1 (2%) was classified as a Cognitive NDEr, 8 (13%) as Affective NDErs, 1 (2%) as a Paranormal NDEr, and 53 (84%) gave accounts that did not meet the criteria for any of the groups. Greyson also carried out various statistical analyses, comparing and contrasting the data collected for both groups (e.g., gender ratios and respondents' ages at time of near-death events).¹⁰¹ Using chi-squared measurements Greyson determined that the difference in NDE Scale scores between the two groups, for all 16 items on the NDE Scale, were highly significant; $p < .0001$.¹⁰² Unlike many of the studies described above, Greyson's presentation of his results is dominated by quantitative information.

2.11. Summary

The following tables summarise twelve of the most important characteristics for each of the ten studies:

Table III

<u>Researchers</u>	<u>Profession</u>	<u>Purpose of Study</u>	<u>Study Region</u>	<u>Size of study Population</u>	<u>Age of study Population</u> ¹⁰³	<u>Gender of study Population</u>	<u>Methods of Recruitment</u>
Moody	Psychiatrist	Describe what it is like to die	U.S.A.	50 NDErs	Adults & Children (~5%)	M & F	R. Rs
Hampe	Lutheran Minister	Put life and death in new perspective via descriptions of what happens between life and death	European	40 NDErs	Adults & Children	M & F	Rs. L
Ring	Psychologist	Scientifically investigate what is experienced on the verge of apparent imminent death	CT. & MN. U.S.A.	102 Experiences: 49 NDErs & 53 non-NDErs	18-14, mean: 38	M 44% F 66%	Rh 53%, Ra 21%
Greyson, Stevenson	Psychiatrists	Describe the characteristic features of the NDE	U.S.A.	78 NDErs	27% ≤ 18 72% ≥ 19	M 38% F 62%	Ra 51%, Rs 49%
Lindley, Bryan, Conley	Research Psychologists	Scientific, objective investigation of the NDE	Pacific northwest U.S.A.	49 NDErs: 55 NDE accounts	Adults and Children	M 38% F 62%	Ra 71%, Rs 29%
Sabom	Cardiologist	Scientifically investigate NDE to test Moody's claims & answer other NDE related questions	Southeastern U.S.A.	78 Experiences: 33 NDErs & 45 non-NDErs	Mean: NDErs 49, non-NDErs 53 ¹⁰⁴	M 82% F 18%	Ph 78 (67%), Rh/Rs 38 (33%)
Gallup	Director of national polling Co.	Determine the frequency of NDE-type experiences & what phenomena they consist of	U.S.A.	1,500 Subjects: 225 experiences: 79 NDErs & 146 non-NDErs	Adults ¹⁰⁵	M 17% F 83% ¹⁰⁶	S 100%

Table III (continued)

<u>Researchers</u>	<u>Profession</u>	<u>Purpose of Study</u>	<u>Study Region</u>	<u>Size of study Population</u>	<u>Age of study Population</u> ¹⁰⁷	<u>Gender of study Population</u>	<u>Methods of Recruitment</u>
Green. Friedman	Psychology students	Attempt to replicate the consistent results of Moody, Ring, Sabom, and Lindley	L.A. area U.S.A.	41 Experiences: 50 NDE accounts (43 NDErs & 7 non-NDErs)	18-67 mean: 29	M 37% F 63%	Ra 71%, R 29%
Grey	Psychologist	Conduct a comparative, cross-cultural investigation of the NDE, based on observations of its "humanistic features"	Britain & U.S.A.	41 Experiences: 38 NDErs & 3 non-NDErs	Adults	M 39% F 61%	Rn + Rh + Rp + Ra = 78%, I 22%
Greyson	Psychiatrist	Contrast of near-death U.S.A. encounters between self-defined 1) NDErs and 2) non-NDErs		246 Experiences: 183 NDErs & 63 non-NDErs	Mean: NDErs 32, non-NDErs 30	M 40% F 60%	Ra 100%

<u>Recruitment Codes:</u>	Accounts found in Literature.....L	Hospital.....Rh
	Personal contacts in hospitals...Ph	Physicians.....Rp
	National surveys.....S	Non-medical.....Rn
	IANDS case histories.....I	Self.....Rs
	Referrals:	Advertisement.....Ra
	Various sources...R	

Table IV

<u>Researchers</u>	<u>Study Inclusion Criteria</u>	<u>"NDE" Criteria</u>	<u>Near-death Events</u>	<u>Data Collection</u>	<u>Presentation of NDE Phenomena</u>
Moody	Unusual experience during either a CD or a CB	Same as inclusion criteria	A,I,IL,H	I, M or D/R	Description of 15 NDE elements using anecdotal excerpts
Hampe	Experience between life and death	Same as inclusion criteria	CO	I (small %)	Descriptive use of excerpts in context of 3 primary NDE categories
Ring	Illness, accident, or suicide attempt resulting in either a CD or a CB	WCEI ¹⁰⁸	IL 50%, A 25% S 25%	I, M and/or D/R	NDErs' accounts illustrating the 5 stages of the NDE
Greyson, Stevenson	Sn	None	IL 40%, I 37%, O 13%, C 7%, D 4%	I, Q, & M	NDE characteristics checklist with relevant statistical information
Lindley, Bryan, Conley	Life threatening situation resulting in either CD or Sd	WCEI	A 72%, IL 24% S 4%	I	Descriptive use of NDErs' accounts within the context of Ring's 5 stages" of the NDE
Sabom	Physiological catastrophe resulting in CD	Mystical encounter with death-event	CA 85%, CO 10% A 5%	I, M	Descriptive use of NDErs' accounts in context of 10 NDE elements from Moody's study
Gallup	Sc involving any unusual experiences on verge-of-death	Mystical experience	A,IL,C,O	I, M	Descriptive use of NDE accounts along with comparisons and contrasts with Christian concepts and relevant data from previous surveys
Green, Friedman	Accident, illness or suicide attempt resulting in Sr and either a CD or a CB	WCEI S 8%	IL 48%, A 44%	I	Descriptions using NDErs' accounts in context of Ring's "5 stages" of the NDE

Table IV (continued)

<u>Researchers</u>	<u>Study Inclusion Criteria</u>	<u>"NDE" Criteria</u>	<u>Near-death Events</u>	<u>Data Collection</u>	<u>Presentation of NDE Phenomena</u>
Grey	CD or Sd ¹⁰⁹ ; Sn ¹¹⁰	Comparison with Ring's "5 stages"	IL 71%, A 22% S 7%	I. M	Descriptive use of NDErs' accounts within the context of Ring's "5 stages" of the NDE
Greyson	Sn or So	None	No info.	NS	Presentation of the "NDE Scale" results of his "NDE Scale"

Inclusion Codes

Clinical Death.....CD
 Close brush with Death....CB
 Self-reported:
 NDErs.....Sn
 NDE-type experience.....Sr
 death and recovery.....Sd
 close brush with death...Sc
 close brush with death
 yet non-NDEr.....So

Event Codes

Accident.....A
 Injury.....I
 Illness.....IL
 In hospital clinical death...H
 Suicide attempt.....S
 Operations.....O
 Childbirth.....C
 Drug ingestion.....D
 Cardiac arrest.....CA
 Coma.....CO

Methods Codes (Data Collection)

Interview (personal with subject).....I
 Medical records reviewed.....M
 Subjects's doctor consulted.....D
 Subject's relatives/friends consulted.....R
 Questionnaire completed by subject.....Q
 Survey(s) completed by subjects.....S
 NDE Scale form completed by subjects.....NS

Answering the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, it can be said first that the most important response to the question "Who are the researchers?" should focus on the perspective from which each approached his/her study. Seven of the ten studies were conducted by psychologists and/or psychiatrists, persons specifically trained in the study and treatment of the human mind.¹¹¹ Of the remaining three Hampe, a Christian minister, fits more readily into this group since his description of the NDE as a phenomenon relies almost exclusively on psychological language and concepts. Gallup and Sabom definitely fall outside of this rather homogeneous group, which is especially noteworthy since, as will be seen below, both recruited and classified their subjects in a more random and representative fashion compared to the other researchers.

There is a unity among all the studies concerning stated purpose in that each aimed to find out what, *phenomenologically*, people report experiencing during a close brush with death. However two minor distinctions can be made. Moody, Hampe, and Ring - the pioneers of modern NDE research - undertook their studies in order to investigate what reportedly takes place when a person is "dying", while the remaining seven set out specifically to explore the "NDE".

Methodologically these 10 studies are relatively analogous, only a few deviations are worth noting here. In seven studies referrals functioned as the main means of recruiting subjects, while Hampe's selection of accounts - principally from various works of literature - stands in sharp contrast to Gallup's random sampling

and Sabom's prospective interviewing methods. In half of the studies¹¹² potential subjects were included if they underwent a physical catastrophe which led to a close brush with death, and in the other half¹¹³ subjects had to also report having had some kind of "experience" during a similar event. In all of the studies data was then collected primarily through personal interviews, except in Greyson's where a questionnaire was mailed to subjects who, after completing it, simply returned it in the post. In addition, more than half of the studies took into consideration other sources of information by consulting their subjects' medical records when possible.¹¹⁴ Working with this raw data Ring, Lindley, and Green employed Ring's WCEI - and Grey Ring's five NDE stages - as their "NDE" criterion, which Gallup and Sabom identified as any mystical experience which took place during a near-death event. In contrast, Moody, Hampe, Greyson/Stevenson and Greyson (1990) did not stipulate any criterion for labelling a person an "NDER", yet this is not surprising since the modern "NDE" did not exist when Moody and Hampe did their work, while the other two studies' subjects were included precisely because they were self-described NDErs.

In terms of what is probably the most important methodological consideration in constructing a typology of the NDE from these studies, the presentation of results among the studies is highly congruous. The studies by Greyson/Stevenson and Greyson (1990) are the only two partial exceptions here, since both employ the "NDE Characteristic Checklist" and "NDE Scale" as the content and the context of their presentations respectively. For the other eight studies excerpts from

the accounts given by their experients make up the "contents"; seven of these do so in the "context" of either NDE "stages" or "elements"¹¹⁵, while Gallup places his excerpts within the context of Christian concepts and the results from his previous surveys addressing similar topics.

Demographically the studies themselves and their subjects were also fairly homogeneous. For the subjects it can be observed that generally: 1) there were only a few accounts given by people who were children (under 18 years of age) at the time of their experience, 2) the women to men ratio was 3:2 in six studies¹¹⁶ and 1:1 in three others¹¹⁷, and 3) accidents, illnesses and suicide attempts account for the vast majority of near-death crisis events. Of the total 950 experients from all the studies combined 875 (92%) were from the U.S.A., 35 (4%) from Britain, and 40 (4%) from continental Europe. Breaking this down we see that half of the studies had a population of 40-50 experients¹¹⁸, two consisted of 78¹¹⁹, Ring's of 102, while Gallup and Greyson's (1990) were composed of 225 and 246 respectively.

Based on these observations it can be seen that the studies by Moody, Ring, Lindley, Green, and Grey make up a *core group* since they are the most homogeneous among the ten. Of the other five studies Sabom and Gallup deviate the greatest from the majority in the following areas 1) purpose of study, 2) method of recruitment, and 3) NDE criterion. Sabom and Gallup also differ from the majority concerning gender ratio and presentation respectively. The studies conducted by Hampe, Greyson/Stevenson, and Greyson (1990) also have several unique characteristics, yet not enough in common to form

a sub-group like Sabom and Gallup. Finally, it should be kept in mind that although Sabom and Gallup's deviations are greater in number than those for Hampe, Greyson/Stevenson, and Greyson (1990) these shared characteristics are positive variations, while those for the other three studies are unquestionably less suitable for the present task than those found in the "core group".

Considering this group as a whole from a more critical perspective, it is acknowledged that even though such an overall degree of homogeneity is by in large highly desirable for the task at hand, in certain respects some might consider this to be quite problematic. From this point of view the substantive question becomes, What (uniform) filtering of data may have taken place? and thus, Will the NDE typology to be constructed in the next chapter be valid? For instance, seven of the ten studies were conducted by psychologists and psychiatrists, while Hampe presented his data within the context of psychological concepts as well. Would the "ineffable" NDE have been described differently if experiencers had been interviewed by a more varied group of researchers? Another methodological challenge has to do with who was and who was not identified as an NDEr. Directly and/or indirectly Lindley, Green, Grey, and Ring all labelled subjects "NDErs" or "non-NDErs" based on the same findings, Moody's NDE elements.¹²⁰ In essence then, half of the information provided by "NDErs" had, in a sense, been filtered through Moody's (admittedly) modest, anecdotally based study. The most glaring problem caused by the homogeneous nature of these studies is that 92% of all experiencers were from

the United States and the rest from continental Europe and the United Kingdom; all of the subjects and researchers were from the West.¹²¹

These apparent "problems" however need not be seen as weaknesses but highly significant boundaries within which the assertions of this thesis must remain. In other words, it is specifically the *Moody-type phenomenon* which is to be investigated, the same phenomenon which, in the West, has clearly become the popular conceptuality of what happens when a person dies. In addition, the validity of generating a typological profile of the NDE from this group of ten different study populations - even beyond the fact of their relatively high level of homogeneity - is also partially upheld by the well established finding that there is no demographic characteristic which can be correlated with either 1) the likelihood of having an NDE or, more importantly here, 2) the specific phenomenological contents of each experient's NDE.¹²²

3.0 Classification of the NDE with Quantitative Data

3.1. Moody

One of the most important of Moody's findings was that he was able to "easily pick out" approximately 15 distinct "elements" which were consistently present throughout the NDE testimonies themselves.¹²³ These elements include: ineffability, hearing the news, feelings of peace and quiet, the noise, the dark tunnel, out of the body, meeting others, the being of light, the review, the border or limit, coming back, telling

others, effect on lives, new views of death, and corroboration.¹²⁴ Moody also pointed out several important aspects of the encounter in a general sense: 1) no two NDEs were identical, 2) not every person experienced every element, though "very many have reported most of them", 3) none of the elements were universally reported (yet some came close), and 4) although the sequence in which the NDE elements took place may have varied from case to case, generally, there was a characteristic progression of the "stages" which rarely varied widely among the cases.¹²⁵ From such observations Moody constructed his now well-known "theoretically 'ideal' or 'complete' experience" as presented in the Introduction.

3.2. Hampe

Hampe's evaluation of the NDE is represented by what he believes is a categorisation of the "activity on the part of the consciousness in the moments before death". He says that even though this activity is quite variable certain "elements" do indeed "recur persistently", concluding that there were three rudimentary categories into which these elements seem to fit: 1) "the escape, or exit, of the self"; 2) "the account rendered by the self, or the 'life panorama'"; and 3) the "expansion of the self".¹²⁶ In many of the accounts he studied such elements could be easily differentiated, in others they were "intertwined", while in some he could identify only one or two of these "essential parts of the activity of dying".¹²⁷ Also, that the activity of the consciousness progresses in

this way does not necessarily mean that the content - or ultimate achievement via this activity - of the experient's consciousness may not be different from that posited in terms of these three elements. Having said that, Hampe later claims that these phenomena represent "what dying will probably be like for (all of) us one day"¹²⁸.

3.3. Ring

In gathering and analysing his data Ring found that some of Moody's elements or "features" were described relatively infrequently among his own experients. This is one of the reasons why Ring decided to propose a conceptuality of the NDE based on stages.¹²⁹ Even though he wanted to distance himself, to a certain degree, from a major aspect of Moody's work, a close correlation remained between the two studies:

Although the stages do not always unfold in the strict sequence in which I have arranged them, they do appear to accord reasonably well with the chain of events described in Moody's prototypical account. Since we also found that their relative incidence over the entire sample decreased systematically with increasing depth of the core experience...we can say that this 'logical' ordering has a measure of empirical support from our data.¹³⁰

When these five stages are arranged in the sequence Ring believed was most appropriate to the data, they formed what he designated the "*basic thanatomimetic narrative* - the experience of (apparent) death in its developmental form."¹³¹ The idea that the core NDE usually progresses in such a specific fashion is qualified by Ring though, particularly since his NDErs

generally had no sense of time passing during their NDEs. Indeed, Ring reports that this carving up of the core experience does a certain amount of violence to the NDE, yet is needed for "narrative purposes".¹³² Table V shows the general, categorical results of Ring's study in relation to these stages.

Table V:
Common Characteristics of Ring's Prototypical NDE¹³³

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Percentage of 102 people experiencing</u>
1	Peace	60%
2	Body separation	37%
3	Entering the darkness	23%
4	Seeing the light	16%
5	Entering the light	10%

3.4. Greyson and Stevenson

Of all the ten studies Greyson and Stevenson's is the most qualitatively concise, offering little more than statistical information on various characteristic features of the NDE.¹³⁴ Unlike Moody, Hampe, and Ring these researchers do not specify a pattern into which the "characteristics" are more or less likely to fall into. Table VI lists these characteristics along with their respective statistical values.

Table VI:¹³⁵
Greyson and Stevenson's Quantitative NDE Data

<u>NDE Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u> <u>(N=78)</u>
Perception of being outside of the physical body (OBE)	75%
Body seen from another point in space	66%
Movement while out of the body	95%
Seeing and hearing of physically present persons	71%
Impression of having a nonphysical body during OBE	58%
Passing through a tunnel or similar structure	31%
Entering some unearthly realm	72%
Border or point of no return	57%
Meeting some person(s) not physically present	49%
Meeting a being of light	27%
Meeting religious figures	25%
Meeting deceased acquaintance	16%
Meeting living acquaintances	14%
Meeting unidentified strangers	26%
Being judged or held accountable for one's life	13%
Unusual visual phenomena (e.g., lights, auras)	48%
Unusual somatic sensations (e.g., warmth, analgesia)	71%
Unusual auditory phenomena (e.g., music, noises)	57%
Unusual olfactory phenomena	25%
Unusual gustatory phenomena	10%
Distortion of the sense of time	79%
Slower passage of time	54%
Extrasensory experiences during the NDE	39%
Belief, during NDE, that one was dying	52%
Review of past events: panoramic memory	27%
NDE as a very positive affective experience	15%
NDE as a mildly positive affective experience	40%
NDE as a neutral or mildly negative experience	45%

3.5. Lindley, Bryan and Conley

Lindley, Bryan, and Conley also reported that the NDE tended to progress according to a common pattern made up of five "distinct stages".¹³⁶ These researchers further observed that 1) not every one of their experients reported each stage, 2) the stages were not always ordered in the exact same way¹³⁷, and 3) every NDEr reported at least one of the stages.¹³⁸ Table VII shows the similarity between their basic statistical results and Ring's.

Table VII¹³⁹:
Lindley, Bryan and Conley's 5 Stages Statistics

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Frequency no. (n=55)</u>
1. Feeling of peace, warmth and well-being	74.5%
2. Body separation	70.9%
3. Darkness	38.2%
4. Light	56.4%
5. Inner setting	34.5%

3.6. Sabom

Sabom's quantitative break-down of his "non-surgical" experients' NDE accounts, according to the ten NDE elements he derived from Moody's *Life After Life*, is shown here in Table VIII:

Table VIII:
Elements of the NDE and Their Frequency
of Occurrence in 61 Non-Surgical Cases¹⁴⁰

<u>Element</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1 Subjective sense of being dead	92%
2 Predominant emotional content of calm and peace	100%
3 Sense of bodily separation	100%
4 Observations of physical objects and events	53%
5 Dark region or void	23%
6 Life review	3%
7 The light	28%
8 Entering a transcendent environment	54%
9 Encountering others	48%
10 Return	100%

Sabom carried his classification of the NDE a step further though, maintaining that each NDE followed one of three "consistent patterns".¹⁴¹ The first type he designated "autoscopic". Autoscopic NDErs were distinguished by their visualisation of their physical bodies from a position of height and perceptions of

other aspects in the same physical setting. Thirty-three percent (20/61) of the non-surgical NDEs he studied contained only autoscopic elements, i.e., visualised details, hearing, attempted communication with others, thought travel and the return.¹⁴² The second NDE pattern was defined by the movement of the experient's consciousness into a foreign realm or dimension "quite apart from the 'earthly' surroundings of his physical body".¹⁴³ Sabom described these as "transcendental". Forty-eight percent (29/61) experienced only these elements, i.e., entering a dark region, encountering others, having a life-review and returning.¹⁴⁴ Some NDErs reported a combination of the autoscopic and transcendent elements, in which cases it was typical for the autoscopic elements to follow the transcendent in a "continuous, unbroken sequence."¹⁴⁵ There were 12 (19%) of these "combined" NDEs in Sabom's study.¹⁴⁶

3.7. Gallup

Of all the researchers Gallup was the most cautious when it came to making generalisations about universal NDE characteristics. However, even though he comments that the NDE is "much more complex than some of the past models or conclusions...offered in the past" and that there is not much sense in setting up probabilities of encountering certain NDE characteristics for each person's death¹⁴⁷, he also presents phenomena in such a way as to suggest their identification with the NDE. Drawing primarily on the information from the 15% of the 1 500 persons he surveyed who reported a near-death

encounter on the verge-of-death, Gallup identified "ten basic positive experiences".¹⁴⁸ Table IX shows his corresponding statistical findings. The frequency of occurrence is represented in percentages for those describing the given phenomenon among 1) all persons who reported a near-death encounter (or "verge-of-death" experience), and 2) the 5% who also reported having a "mystical encounter" during their verge-of-death experiences. This second group is labelled "Gallup's NDErs", simplifying the terminology used to identify experiencers who reported a simultaneous verge-of-death experience and mystical encounter¹⁴⁹.

Table IX:
Gallup's General Statistical Findings

<u>Positive Experience</u>	<u>"Verge-of-death"</u> <u>experiencers</u> (n=225)	<u>Gallup's</u> <u>NDErs</u> (N=79)
1. An out-of-body sensation.....	9%	26%
2. Visual perception of events in an earthly and/or non-earthly realm.....	8%	23%
3. Audible sounds of human voices in an earthly and/or non-earthly realm.....	6%	17%
4. An overwhelming sense of peace and painlessness.....	11%	31%
5. Seeing a single light or several bright lights.....	5%	14%
6. The impression of reviewing or reexamining one's past life.....	11%	31%
7. A special feeling or sensation such as being in another world.....	11%	31%
8. A feeling that another being or beings, other than living humans who have been left behind, are present.....	8%	23%
9. A sense of the presence of some sort of tunnel.....	3%	8%
10. Premonitions about some event or events that would happen in the future....	2%	6% ¹⁵⁰

3.8. Green and Friedman

Although there were a couple of minor differences between the findings of this study and those of Ring and Moody, it was confirmed that the NDE proceeds in a "sequentially stable manner". It was also determined that not every experient went through every stage and in a few cases stages I and II took place in a reversed order.¹⁵¹ Table X shows the quantitative results of this study:

Table X:¹⁵²
Green and Friedman's 5 NDE Stage Statistics

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Percentage of 50 NDE Accounts</u>
1	Core Affective Cluster	70%
2	Out-of-Body Experience	66%
3	Tunnel/Dark Area	32%
4	Seeing the light	62%
5	Entering the light	18%

3.9. Grey

As a whole Grey's cases exhibited the same "common basic features" as Ring's.¹⁵³ She also discovered that the "pattern" of the "core experience" remained consistent regardless of whether the subject was an American or British citizen.¹⁵⁴ At this point in the development of modern NDE research it did not surprise anyone when Grey also observed that, although every subject did not report every stage of the core experience, the earlier stages were invariably recounted more often than the latter.¹⁵⁵ Her own classification of the NDE could be viewed as a synthesis of Moody's "elements" and Ring's "stages". In the context of five

stages or groups, Grey's 25 "characteristics" and their frequency of occurrence are shown in Table XI:

Table XI:
The Twenty-Five Most Generally Experienced
Qualities Encountered Within the "Core Experience"

<u>Components of the "core experience"</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Altered state of feeling</u>		
Peace and euphoria	18	47
Joy and happiness	11	29
No more pain	13	34
No more fear	6	16
Warm and glowing	9	24
<u>Separation from the body</u>		
Clear view of the body	8	21
Suspended above the body	12	32
Detached and relaxed	9	24
Heightened awareness	3	8
Illuminated environment	8	21
<u>Entering the darkness</u>		
Dimensionless	5	13
Floating or drifting	3	8
Very rapid movement	10	26
Tunnel sensation	10	26
Rushing noise	4	11
<u>Seeing the light</u>		
Distant point of light	8	21
Magnetic pull	2	5
Enveloped in light and love	15	39
Blinding light but eyes unhurt	6	16
Ineffable beauty	10	26
<u>The inner world</u>		
Beautiful landscapes and buildings	7	18
Heavenly music	4	11
Brilliant glowing colours	7	18
Feeling of oneness	8	21
Telepathic communication	10	26

Of the forty-one people interviewed, thirty-eight described an event that fell within the category of the "core experience". These are the experients represented in this analysis.¹⁵⁶

3.10. Greyson

The classification of the NDE by Greyson is shown below as the product of his 16 item NDE Scale. As an

introduction only the quantitative data for those self-defined as NDErs is given here, although, throughout the detailed treatment of the NDE types in the next chapter data will also be presented for the self-defined non-NDErs as well.

Table XII:¹⁵⁷
NDErs' Responses to the NDE Scale

		Percentage of NDErs (n = 183)
<u>Cognitive</u>		
I.	Did time seem to speed up?	
1.	No.	16
2.	Time seemed to go faster than usual, or slower.	10
3.	Everything seemed to be happening all at once; or time stopped, or lost all meaning.	74
II.	Were your thoughts speeded up?	
1.	No.	56
2.	Faster than usual.	16
3.	Incredibly fast.	26
III.	Did scenes from your past come back to you?	
1.	No.	75
2.	Remembered many past events.	8
3.	Past flashed before me, out of my control.	17
IV.	Did you suddenly seem to understand everything?	
1.	No.	46
2.	About myself or others.	19
3.	About the universe.	35

Affective

V.	Did you have a feeling of peace or pleasantness?	
1.	No.	8
2.	Relief or calmness.	18
3.	Incredible peace or pleasantness.	74
VI.	Did you have a feeling of joy?	
1.	No.	23
2.	Happiness.	20
3.	Incredible joy.	57
VII.	Did you feel a sense of harmony or unity with the universe?	
1.	No.	22
2.	No longer in conflict with nature.	23
3.	United, one with the world.	55
VIII.	Did you see or feel surrounded by a brilliant light?	
1.	No.	28
2.	Unusually bright light.	26
3.	Light clearly of mystical or otherworldly origin.	46

Paranormal

IX.	Were your senses more vivid than usual?	
1.	No.	34
2.	More so than usual.	26
3.	Incredibly more so.	40
X.	Did you seem to be aware of things going on elsewhere, as if by ESP?	
1.	No.	66
2.	Yes, but facts not yet corroborated.	20
3.	Yes, and facts later corroborated.	14

XI.	Did scenes from the future come to you?	
1.	No.	80
2.	From personal future.	9
3.	From the World's future.	11
XII.	Did you feel separated from your physical body?	
1.	No.	14
2.	Lost awareness of body.	31
3.	Clearly left the body and existed outside it.	55
<u>Transcendental</u>		
XIII.	Did you seem to enter some other, unearthly world?	
1.	No.	24
2.	Unfamiliar, strange place.	20
3.	Clearly mystical or unearthly realm.	56
XIV.	Did you seem to encounter a mystical being or presence?	
1.	No.	41
2.	Unidentifiable voice.	9
3.	Definite being, or voice clearly of mystical or otherworldly origin.	50
XV.	Did you see deceased spirits or religious figures?	
1.	No.	64
2.	Sensed their presence.	11
3.	Saw them.	25
XVI.	Did you come to a border or point of no return?	
1.	No.	31
2.	Conscious decision to "return" to life.	30
3.	Barrier I was not permitted to cross; or "sent back" to life involuntarily.	39

Special note should be taken here to recall an important distinguishing aspect of this study, i.e., its explicit purpose was to "contrast the near-death encounters of persons who claimed to have had NDEs with

those of persons who denied having had NDEs"¹⁵⁸ rather than focus primarily on the phenomenological information generated by one type of experience. Even though, when measuring the occurrence and amplitude of NDEs between these *self-defined* NDErs and *self-defined* non-NDErs, "every comparison" was statistically significant this does not preclude the possibilities that 1) not every one of the 16 items on Greyson's NDE Scale represents a unique NDE feature, and/or 2) that some of the subjects misdescribed themselves. In light of the fact that some self-defined non-NDErs reported NDE phenomenon and some self-defined NDErs did not report enough NDE phenomenon to score as NDErs on the NDE Scale, Greyson also recognises that further research is needed in order to more firmly establish what criteria should be used to determine who has had an NDE and who has not. Accordingly, it is believed that the presentation in the next chapter of both groups' responses may contribute to a more accurate NDE typology.

3.11. Summary

In four of the studies the NDE data was basically given as isolated NDE phenomena:

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Moody | "elements" |
| 2. Greyson/Stevenson | "characteristics" |
| 3. Gallup | "basic, positive experiences" |
| 4. Greyson (1990) | "items" |

The information provided by the other six was organised into NDE categories or stages:

1. Hampe "3 categories"
2. Ring "5 stages"
3. Lindley "5 stages"
4. Sabom "3 consistent patterns"
5. Green "5 stages"
6. Grey "5 stages"

The relative insignificance of these differences can be asserted on two different levels. First, even a quick glance at the tables above is enough to confirm that the overwhelming similarity of NDE phenomena reported to the researchers becomes slightly obscured here by the use of dissimilar labels (e.g., an out-of-the-body phenomena is labelled an "element" by Moody and a "stage" by Green). Secondly, among the studies which did group the NDE phenomena into categories/stages not only is there an extremely high level of consistency (methodologically influenced in at least four cases) but each also noted that such a sequencing of the phenomena was certainly much more variable than the presence of reoccurring NDE phenomena themselves. Whether it is in terms of "characteristics", "basic positive experiences", or "stages", the classifications and quantifications of the NDE offered by the ten primary studies provide a degree of similarity which makes the formulation of a comprehensive NDE typological profile possible.

In the interest of presenting a concise quantitative summary of this section the most common approach to the NDE numerical data will be taken. In other words, what has been described above as the "core experience" is represented below in the context of "5

stages". The two tables below represent therefore what can be described as statistical snap-shots of the NDE in terms of the predominant NDE typological categories.¹⁵⁹ Table XIII consists of the four studies which produced general statistical data for their entire study populations (i.e. Ring, Lindley, Gallup and Greyson's [1990]).¹⁶⁰ Table XIV is made up of the remaining studies, those which provided the same statistical information yet only for their NDErs.¹⁶¹

Table XIII:
Predominant NDE Typological Categories
in "Stages" for Entire Study Populations

	A	B	C	D ¹⁶²	E
1) Positive affective experience during the NDE, e.g. peacefulness	60%	75%	11%	59% ¹⁶³	43%
2) Separation from physical body	37%	71%	9%	42% ¹⁶⁴	32%
3) Perception of a dark void or tunnel-like area	23%	38%	3%	no info.	13%
4) Seeing a light	16%	56%	5%	55% ¹⁶⁵	31%
5) Entering a transcendent realm beyond the darkness/tunnel	10%	35%	11%	42% ¹⁶⁶	25%

A) Ring (n=102) D) Greyson (1990) (n=246)
 B) Lindley (n=55)
 C) Gallup (n=225) E) Weighted Mean

Table XIV:
Predominant NDE Typological Categories
In "Stages" For NDErs Only

	A	B	C	D	E
1) Positive affective experience during the NDE, e.g. peacefulness	55% ¹⁶⁷	100%	70%	47%	60%
2) Separation from physical body	75%	100%	66%	>50% ¹⁶⁸	76%
3) Perception of a dark void or tunnel-like area	31%	23%	32%	20% ¹⁶⁹	27%
4) Seeing a light	48%	28%	62%	25% ¹⁷⁰	42%
5) Entering a transcendent realm beyond the darkness/tunnel	72%	54%	18%	30% ¹⁷¹	48%

A) Greyson/Stevenson (n=78) D) Grey (n=38)
B) Sabom (n=61)
C) Green (n=50) E) Weighted Mean

In the first instance what these tables show us is that there exists a statistically important repetition of reported NDE phenomena among the eight study populations represented. To a limited extent the overall greater weighted means figures produced by those studies which offered data for their NDErs only confirms these particular five categories/phenomena as NDE specific. In contrast, since the weighted means also show that 1) positive affective experiences and 2) separation from the physical body are by far the most frequently reported phenomena among *all* the studies, and "perception of a dark void or tunnel-like area" is invariably the least, it is probably safe to contend that a rather significant level of quantitative homogeneity exists among these eight studies.¹⁷² However, since this second half of this chapter represented only an introduction to the researchers' descriptive categories and basic quantitative findings

such assertions remain to be put to the test in the endeavour to construct a detailed NDE typology solely utilising these studies.

4.0 Summary

In this chapter we have seen that among the only ten up-to-date studies which were able to meet our exacting inclusion criteria a high level of homogeneity existed in terms of who the researchers were, their stated purposes, their study populations, and their methodologies. Predominantly these researchers are persons interested in the study and treatment of the human mind (i.e., psychologists and psychiatrists), setting out to discover what phenomena *all kinds of adult* persons report experiencing during a close brush with physical/biological death. In most cases persons making up the study populations were attained via referrals and responses to surveys/questionnaires. In half of the studies these people had to have had a close brush with biological death, while the others had to also recount some "conscious" experience(s) at this time as well. The primary method of collecting data was via personal interviews and its presentation principally took the form of excerpts from the experients' accounts, organised typologically. Among the ten a "core group" of five studies was identified - including Moody, Ring, Lindley, Green, and Grey - since their level of homogeneity was extraordinarily high.

It was recognised that such unanimity could be problematic, particularly in terms of a consistent filtering of the data. Instead of abandoning this

research in the light of this fact it has been posited that these common factors/characteristics should be viewed as the "boundaries" within which the primary, phenomenological data produced by these studies - and the later assertions which they will ground - must remain within. Hence, it was concluded that it is the Moody-type phenomenon, that which in the West has become the popular understanding of what it like to die. The validity/credibility of producing an NDE typology from these ten different study populations was further maintained by pointing out the well-established findings that there is no demographic factor which has ever been firmly correlated with either the probability of having an NDE or the particular phenomena of which it consists.

It was then argued that it was relatively insignificant that four of the studies presented the NDE data primarily in terms of isolated phenomena and six as stages/categories. Indeed, there exists an overwhelming similarity of reported NDE phenomena among all ten, a high degree of consistency among the different researchers' groupings, and a virtually unanimous admission by these researchers that their models of how NDEs unfold are far more variable than the presence of the individual NDE types themselves.

The two tables at the end of this chapter demonstrated that there probably does exist a numerically significant repetition of reported NDE phenomena among at least eight of the studies. The precise extent to which these studies actually are quantitatively harmonious should become more and more apparent in the next chapter, as such data is brought together in great detail. Thus, making use of both the

qualitative and quantitative findings of these studies as a whole, we turn our attention in the next chapter to formulating an NDE typology.

ENDNOTES

¹ Two of the ten primary studies failed to meet this criteria yet were included on the grounds that both, published simultaneously, are primary studies of the complete NDE as a unique phenomenon. Both Moody's *Life After Death*, and Hampe's *To Die is Gain*, offer a full phenomenology of the NDE in qualitative terms. In addition, these investigations independently reported similar findings, which, as it will be seen, have been confirmed time and time again in the twenty years since they were published. (Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975) *Life after life*. Mockingbird Books, New York. Hampe, J. C. (1979) *To die is gain; the experience of one's own death*. translated by Longman and Todd, London [first published as *Sterben ist doch ganz anders*, Breitwissenstrasse, Kreuz Verlag, Stuttgart, 1975]).

² Moody, 9.

³ Ibid, 16-17.

⁴ Ibid, 146.

⁵ Ibid, 25-111.

⁶ Hampe, op. cit.

⁷ Ibid, xiii.

⁸ Moody, 181.

⁹ Hampe, xiii.

¹⁰ Ibid, 32-94.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 87.

¹³ Ring, K. (1980) *Life at death a scientific investigation of the near-death experience*. Coward,

McCann and Georghagan, New York, 15-16.

¹⁴ Ibid, 27.

¹⁵ Ibid, 109.

¹⁶ These included nurses, clergymen, and administrative personnel in key hospital locations. (Ring, 27-28).

¹⁷ Ring, 27-28. Both the letters sent to psychiatrists and the advertisements communicated his interest in "speaking to persons who had come close to death as a result of either accident or suicide attempt", with no mention being made of NDEs specifically and no offer of remuneration offered for referrals or to the experiencers themselves. (Ibid, 27).

¹⁸ Ibid, 28.

¹⁹ Because part of Ring's purpose in doing this research was to investigate, scientifically, the NDE as described by Moody, the WCEI was based directly on the "elements" described in *Life After Life*. Ring writes of the WCEI as being a measure of the "Moody-type experience". In fact, whenever Ring uses his own term "core experience" he is referring to a "Moody-type experience". (Ring, 32-34).

²⁰ Ibid, 32-33. Theoretically the lowest score is 0, while the highest possible would be a 29. This is because the second, third and fourth components on the WCEI, all weighted at 2, could be given a value of 1 or 2 based on the level of experience for each. Thus these three components could each yield a score of 0, 2, or 4. Actual scores varied from 0 to 24, with categories including: < 6, non-experiencer; 6-9, "moderate experiencers"; 10 or greater, "deep experiencers". (Ring, 33).

²¹ Ibid, 32-34.

²² Ibid, 39.

²³ Ibid, 39-82.

²⁴ Ibid, 29.

²⁵ Greyson, B., and Stevenson, I. (1980) The phenomenology of near-death experiences. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 137 (10), 1193-1196.

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- ²⁶ Ibid, 1193.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ This included the respondents' having been "on the threshold of death". (Ibid, 1193).
- ²⁹ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 1193. The researchers do not provide the text that was used in the announcements to procure subjects.
- ³¹ The experiences reported in this study occurred between 1 and 67 years before this study took place, with 60% of the respondents claiming to have "detailed recollections of the experience" and 83% claiming that their NDEs were "clearer than...memories of other events from the same time period". (Greyson and Stevenson, 1195).
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid, 1194-1195.
- ³⁴ Lindley, J. H., Bryan, S., and Conley, B. (1981) Near-death experiences in a pacific northwest american population: the evergreen study. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 1, 104-124. (This study will be referenced using only Lindley's name throughout this thesis.)
- ³⁵ Ibid, 105.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 119.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 106-107.
- ³⁸ These researchers report that they did not attempt to confirm whether or not their subjects had actually been clinically dead or in danger of dying. (Ibid, 106).
- ³⁹ Ibid, 117.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 118. Accidental death was defined as "that which occurs unexpectedly through carelessness or by chance, including electrocution, hemorrhaging, reaction to drugs and anesthesia, etc." (Ibid).
- ⁴¹ Lindley, 117-118. Of the excerpts given 2 contain NDEs that took place when experiencers were children, and the remaining approximately 20 accounts seem to be those of

adults.

⁴² Ibid, 107-112.

⁴³ Sabom, M. (1982) *Recollections of death: a medical investigation*. Corgi Books, Transworld Publishers LTD, London. This study was based on material collected from May 1976 to March of 1981. (Sabom, 29).

⁴⁴ Sabom agreed so whole-heartedly with Moody's statement at the end of *Life After Life* - i.e., "what I have done here does not constitute a scientific study" (Moody, 181) - that he could not resist the temptation to disprove Moody's unscientific work by conducting a first-hand study himself, as a Cardiologist. (Sabom 15-20).

⁴⁵ According to Sabom a "prospective study" is one in which the interviewer/researcher does not know beforehand whether the subject has had the experience in question. (Sabom, 24, 28).

⁴⁶ At the time of the study Kreutziger, a psychiatric social worker, was a Ph.D. candidate in Social Work. (Sabom, 29).

⁴⁷ Sabom, 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 82-83.

⁵¹ Sabom was interested in those cases in which

the state of unconsciousness was the direct result of a "near-death crisis event". Accordingly, the 10 cases in which unconsciousness was initially caused by the administration of a general anesthetic at the beginning of an operation did not meet the established criteria for the study. These were analyzed by Sabom in isolation from the other cases. (Sabom, 82).

⁵² Sabom, 82.

⁵³ Ibid, 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 84-85. For those cases that were referrals

medical records were consulted whenever possible. (Sabom, 28).

⁵⁶ Ibid, 24-26. The ten elements included the following: Subjective sense of being dead, Predominant emotional content of calm and peace, Sense of bodily separation, Observations of physical objects and events, Dark region or void, Life review, The light, Entering a transcendent environment, Encountering others, Return. (Sabom, see Table IX, 278).

⁵⁷ Sabom, Table IV, 266-271.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 82-83.

⁵⁹ Ibid, Table VI, 273.

⁶⁰ Ibid, Table II, 264.

⁶¹ Gallup, G.Jr., with Proctor, W. (1983) *Adventures in immortality: a look beyond the threshold of death*. Souvenir, London, 1-2.

⁶² For example each individual's religious, educational and geographical background was taken into consideration. (Ibid, 2).

⁶³ Gallup, 183.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 6, see also 183-185.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 6-12.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 3-4.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁸ Green, T. J., and Friedman, P. (1983) Near-death experiences in a southern California population. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3, 77-96. (For the remainder of this thesis the study conducted by Green and Friedman will be identified with Green's name only.) The Advertisements were published as follows: "Psychological researcher interested in interviewing persons who have been close to death or clinically dead." (Green, 79).

⁶⁹ Gallup, 79.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 92.

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- ⁷¹ Ibid, 77-78.
- ⁷² Ibid, 79.
- ⁷³ Ibid, 80.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid, 79.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, 77 and 80.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 80-92.
- ⁷⁸ Grey, M. (1985) *Return from death*. Arkana (Routledge and Kegan Paul), London, 21.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 1-6.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 23 (*Italic mine*).
- ⁸¹ Ibid, 26.
- ⁸² Ibid, 26- 27. Responses to an advertisement placed in a number of British newspapers also provided subjects. These were solicited in order to find out if these subjects would differ in any way from those obtained through referrals from professional careers. Grey found no differences. (Grey does not offer the content of her advertisement.).
- ⁸³ Grey, 25.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid, 30.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid, 89.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid, 28.
- ⁸⁷ Grey states that she used Ring's 5 stages as the "basis" for her comparative study, where she considered "each interview transcript in order to see which part of the NDE fitted into the different categories". (Grey, 30).
- ⁸⁸ Grey, 30-32.
- ⁸⁹ Greyson, B. (1990) Near-death encounters with and without near-death experiences: comparative NDE scale profiles. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 8 (3), 151-

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- 161.
- ⁹⁰ Greyson does not provide the text of his advertisements.
- ⁹¹ Greyson, 152.
- ⁹² Ibid, 154.
- ⁹³ Ibid, 151-152.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid, 152.
- ⁹⁵ Greyson, B. (1983) The near-death experience scale: construction, reliability, and validity. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 171 (6), 369-375.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid, 369.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid, 372-273.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid, 371.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid, 374-375, see also 372 -373.
- ¹⁰⁰ Greyson, 1990, 155 and 159.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid, 154-159.
- ¹⁰² Ibid, 159.
- ¹⁰³ This data represents the ages of the subjects at the time of their experiences.
- ¹⁰⁴ Sabom's data represents mean age at time of interview for his study. (p. 244, Table II).
- ¹⁰⁵ Gallup's data represents age at time of being surveyed for his study.
- ¹⁰⁶ These figures represent percentages for all 1,500 subjects.
- ¹⁰⁷ This data represents the ages of the subjects at the time of their experiences.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ring's Weighted Core Experience Index.
- ¹⁰⁹ These were the criteria for the British subjects.

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- ¹¹⁰ This was the criterion for the American subjects.
- ¹¹¹ Green and Friedman were students of psychology when they did their study.
- ¹¹² These include those by Ring, Lindley, Sabom, Green, and Grey (British subjects).
- ¹¹³ Those by Moody, Hampe, Greyson/Stevenson, Gallup, Grey (American subjects), and Greyson (1990).
- ¹¹⁴ These included the studies conducted by Moody, Ring, Greyson/Stevenson, Sabom, Gallup, and Grey.
- ¹¹⁵ These six are Moody, Hampe, Ring, Lindley, Sabom, Green, and Grey.
- ¹¹⁶ These include the studies conducted by Ring, Greyson/Stevenson, Lindley, Green, Grey, and Greyson (1990).
- ¹¹⁷ These include Moody, Hampe, and Gallup's studies. Sabom's study population is unique in that the female to male ratio is 4:1.
- ¹¹⁸ Those conducted by Moody, Hampe, Lindley, Green, and Grey.
- ¹¹⁹ Those by Greyson/Stevenson and Sabom.
- ¹²⁰ As was shown above, Ring used his Weighted Core Experience Index (WCEI) as the NDE criterion. This was subsequently employed by Lindley and Green as well. Ring developed the WCEI, to a large extent, by using what Moody published as the common "NDE elements". Hence these were instrumental in Ring's identification of his "five stages" (of the NDE), subsequently used as an important part of Grey's NDE criteria as well.
- ¹²¹ Unfortunately non-Western NDE studies, as well as those conducted outside of the U.S.A., are rare, and none that do exist were large enough to be included in this research project.
- ¹²² Though there does seem to be a couple of possible, minor correlations found among these researchers, at this point it seems as if these do not have any significant impact on the NDE phenomena themselves. For detailed information on this topic see the following:

Moody, 15, 21, 135, 136, 140-144; Ring, 105-137, 200, 201; Greyson/Stevenson, 1195; Lindley, 107, 113, 118, 122; Sabom, 84-87; Gallup, 198-200; Grey, 32, 89-91, 173; and Greyson (1990), 159.

¹²³ Moody, 21.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 25-107.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 23-24.

¹²⁶ Hampe, 32.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 94.

¹²⁹ Ring, 189.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid, 39.

¹³² Ibid, 189-190.

¹³³ Ibid, 40.

¹³⁴ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194-1195.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Lindley, 105.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 123.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 108.

¹⁴⁰ Sabom, 278.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 81.

¹⁴² Ibid, 43-59, cf. Table VIII, 276-277.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 62.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 60-77, cf. Table VIII, 276-277.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 77-80. cf. Table VIII, 276-277.

	<u>Autoscopic</u>	<u>Transcendent</u>	<u>Combined</u>
1) Non-surgical NDErs	20/61	29/61	12/61
2) Surgical NDErs	1/10	9/10	none

(Sabom, 77).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 77.

¹⁴⁷ Gallup, 33.

¹⁴⁸ Gallup did find that some NDErs had mildly negative experiences or mixed positive and negative NDEs, with 1% reporting a "hellish" NDE. In his analysis - of the information he collected from the 225 (15% of his study population) persons reporting a close encounter with death - comparisons are made with traditional "heaven" and "hell" concepts. His "ten basic positive experiences" are treated in relation to "heaven", while several other negative aspects of some NDEs are related to "hell". (Gallup, 76-84).

¹⁴⁹ Gallup uses the term "near-death experience" throughout his book, along with other terms like "near-death adventure" and "near-death reports", all in reference to the same experients.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 31-32.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 92-93.

¹⁵² Ibid, 93.

¹⁵³ Grey, 30.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 31-32.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 32.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 31.

¹⁵⁷ Greyson (1990), 156-158.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 152. Ital. Mine.

¹⁵⁹ Throughout the next chapter, along with this generalized quantitative information, the other relevant statistical data introduced above will be used to construct a detailed NDE typology.

¹⁶⁰ Gallup is included since he provides data for all those persons who had a verge-of-death experience, which was essentially the same characteristic shared by all the experiencers in the other studies. The statistics used for Greyson's (1990) population were taken from the results of his "NDE Scale" for both self-reported NDEers and self-reported Non-NDEers.

¹⁶¹ These are the studies done by Greyson (1990) and Stevenson; Sabom; Green and Friedman; and Grey. Greyson/Stevenson's information comes only from (self-reported) NDEers, Sabom's from his 61 non-surgical, prospective NDEers, Green's entire study population consisted of only those individuals who gave an account similar to NDE accounts as found in the presentations by Moody and Ring, and Grey only offers general statistics for her 38 NDEers.

¹⁶² This represents the statistical information from Greyson's 1990 publication.

¹⁶³ This includes all those in Greyson's (1990) study who claimed to experience "Incredible peace or pleasantness" during their near death encounter.

¹⁶⁴ This includes all those in Greyson's (1990) study who claimed to have "clearly left the body and existed outside it".

¹⁶⁵ This includes all those in Greyson's (1990) study who claimed to experience an "unusually bright light" and those who experienced a "light clearly of mystical or otherworldly origin".

¹⁶⁶ This figure represents all those in Greyson's (1990) study who claimed to encounter a "clearly mystical or unearthly realm".

¹⁶⁷ Comprising 15% who had a very positive affective experience and 40% who had a mildly positive affective experience during their NDEers. (Greyson/Stevenson, 1194-1195).

¹⁶⁸ Over 50% of Grey's NDEers "claimed to have visually

clear OBEs" during their NDE. (Grey, 34).

¹⁶⁹ Weighted mean of 13% reporting a "Dimensionless" space and 26% reporting a "tunnel sensation". (Grey, 31).

¹⁷⁰ Weighted mean of 21% who saw a "distant point of light", 39% "enveloped in light and love", and 16% who saw a "blinding light but (their) eyes (were) not hurt". (Grey, 31).

¹⁷¹ Grey reports that approximately 30% of her NDErs "gave evidence of penetrating this final stage", which she relates to in terms of "heaven". (Grey, 49).

¹⁷² It is recognised that the quantitative values produced by Gallup and Greyson do deviate from the other studies somewhat in their proportionality. It is highly probable that this reflects the fact that both of these studies consisted of study populations which were at least three times larger than seven of the other studies, and more than twice as large as the remaining study (i.e., Ring's).

CHAPTER THREE
THE NDE TYPOLOGY

1.0 Introduction

Although common characteristics and stages have been identified for the NDE in all ten studies, each experient's encounter remains a highly personal and, in many ways, singular experience. In fact, when experiencers attempt to describe specifically what happened during their NDEs most find that suitable words do not exist. Even analogies to previous experiences are said to be inadequate.¹ This ineffability stands as one of the NDE's most characteristic and phenomenologically problematic qualities. Given this fact, there is still no doubt in the experient's mind that, while it was happening and later, his/her NDE was real. Whether or not the NDE is "objectively real", whatever that may mean, is not the issue here. Experiencers report that their NDEs were not imaginary or dream-like, but vividly and consciously experienced.²

Both ineffable and "real", the NDE is also said to be beyond anything in normal, everyday life. Indeed, this is not an event which falls within the context of "life" as it was previously known by experiencers. Even time is distorted during the NDE; sometimes it is slowed down but most often it is said to be non-existent.³ Thus, given the anomalous phenomena experienced and the fact that most NDEs are triggered by a close brush with physical death it is not surprising that the vast majority of NDErs believed themselves to be in the

process of dying or already dead during their NDEs.⁴ To summarise these fundamental observation, it can be said that even though the NDE transcends language, time, and even "life" it is perceived as being a very "real" experience.

Below the definitive NDE types will be presented in six sections, in the context of the most commonly reported "stages" or "phases" of the NDE identified by the previous chapter's "core group" of researchers. These sections include,

- 1) Emotional content of peace and painlessness
- 2) The out-of-the-body-experience (OBE)
- 3) The darkness/void
- 4) The light
- 5) The transcendent realm/experience
- 6) Returning

Both qualitative and quantitative data will be presented. Because some of the six stages contain common phenomena, repetition of data is unavoidable, although, it is expected that this will provide a more appropriate typology of the NDE than if such repetition were avoided

2.0 Emotional Content of Peace and Painlessness

2.1 NDE Peace and Painlessness Generally

It has been well established that the NDE is an overwhelmingly positive affective experience.⁵ In this section it will be shown that this is true for both the NDE as a whole and most of its constituent phenomena.

I began to experience the most wonderful feelings. I couldn't feel a thing in the world, except peace, comfort, ease - just quietness. I felt that all my troubles were gone, and I thought to myself, "Well, how quiet and peaceful and I don't hurt at all."⁶

This excerpt from an NDE account given by a woman who was resuscitated following a heart attack is indicative of the phenomenon that tends to characterise the first stage of the NDE. This distinguishes it from other close brushes with death, for there are usually no perceptions beyond the state of apparent, physical unconsciousness which the experient can later recall. Ring refers to this "quietness" as the "peaceful silence"⁷ of the NDE's first stage, which is a "consistent and dramatically positive emotional response to apparent near-death".⁸ In contrast, the majority of his non-experiencers⁹ had no "emotional response" during their close brushes with death.¹⁰ Specifically, 59% of Ring's NDErs reported feelings of "peace" compared to only 15% of the non-experiencers, while 49% of his core experiencers remembered a transition from pain before their NDEs to a lack of pain at the outset of the experience, in contrast to 13% of the non-experiencers.¹¹ In fact, of 170 emotions mentioned by his NDErs only 8 were of a negative quality, having to do with some type of fear which tended to be transitory, occurring only at the beginning or after the NDE.¹²

In her comparative study Grey gave her first stage the descriptive title "Altered state of feeling". Five "qualities" were found to typify this stage, the statistics of which are as follows: 47% of her 38 NDErs experienced "peace and euphoria", 29% "joy and

happiness", 34% "no more pain", 16% "no more fear", and 24% reported a "warm and glowing" emotional state.¹³ Generally speaking, the majority of her NDErs experienced an "extremely positive sensation" during their NDEs whereas her non-experiencers were unaware of having had any "emotions" during their close brushes with death.¹⁴

Sabom described this NDE phenomenon in the following way:

What predominated was a feeling of calm, peace and/or tranquillity, in marked contrast to the physical pain and suffering experienced when the person was in a conscious, physical state immediately prior to, or following, the near-death experience.¹⁵

All of his NDErs reported an NDE that consisted of a "predominant emotional content of calm and peace".¹⁶ Similarly, the principal emotional state described by thirty-five (70%) of Green's experiencers was distinguished by its "overwhelming peace, calm, and painlessness."¹⁷ As the "core affective cluster" this phenomenon was not experienced as a stage but as a continuous characteristic of the NDE which persisted throughout.¹⁸

Greyson and Stevenson's findings were more evenly distributed; 15% of their subjects found their NDEs to be a "very positive experience", 40% "mildly positive", and 45% "neutral or mildly negative".¹⁹ Ten years later, in his comparative study, Greyson offered a different group of subjects three questions relevant to the emotional content of their NDEs. The first question Greyson asked was "Did you have a feeling of peace or

pleasantness?" The responses he received were
statistically significant:

	<u>NDErs</u> <u>(n = 183)</u>	<u>non-NDErs</u> <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	8%	55%
2 Relief or calmness.	18%	29%
3 Incredible peace or pleasantness.	74%	16%

To the question, "Did you have a feeling of joy?", the
results were:

	<u>NDErs</u> <u>(n = 183)</u>	<u>non-NDErs</u> <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	23%	72%
2 Happiness.	20%	17%
3 Incredible joy.	57%	11%

To the third question, "Did you feel a sense of harmony
or unity with the universe?", Greyson's subjects
responded in the following ways:

	<u>NDErs</u> <u>(n = 183)</u>	<u>non-NDErs</u> <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	22%	73%
2 No longer in conflict with nature.	23%	10%
3 United, one with the world.	55%	17%

It is important to note that the chi-squared measurement for all three questions was the same, $p. < 0.005$, which is highly significant.²⁰

Among the 55 NDE accounts given to Lindley there were 41 (74%) which could be effectively portrayed in terms of "feelings of peace, warmth and well-being". This NDE phenomenon is so representative of the NDE that Lindley and his colleagues actually became tired of hearing about it: "it is often exhausting to listen to these accounts of *sheer bliss* because they are so predictable".²¹

Again, one of the most common experiences reported by Gallup's NDErs was the overall, extreme pleasantness of their near-death episodes. More specifically this typically included an "overwhelming sense of peace and painlessness"²² and "tranquillity of mind"²³; experiencers felt that they had "moved into some sort of pleasant, relaxed and often beautiful state or dimension".²⁴ Statistically 31% of Gallup's NDErs had positive feelings about the whole event, even to the point of thoroughly enjoying it.²⁵ Although, like Ring, Gallup discovered a few cases where negative emotions had been experienced at the beginning or the end of the NDE. For instance, some of Gallup's subjects described having an initial sense of fear and/or puzzlement as they watched, during their out-of-the-body experiences, their relatives grieve over their apparent death.²⁶ Moody had also found that NDErs were sometimes "confused", "very afraid" or "panicky", all of which has to do with the experiencer's sudden perception that he/she has "left" his/her physical body.²⁷

In a general sense then, it can be said that the emotional content of the NDE is dominated by feelings of extreme pleasantness, peace, and painlessness. This feature of the NDE, although considered by some of the researchers to be the first stage or phase of the NDE, is best understood as a major factor experienced throughout the NDE. We turn now to some of the common ways in which such a continuity is facilitated.

2.2 NDE Peace and Painlessness and the other NDE Types

During the out-of-the-body-experience (OBE), presented by some researchers as the second stage of the NDE, Gallup's NDErs were "permeated by a sense of well-being and highly mobile - not at all constrained by our usual limits of time and space".²⁸ Hampe was cited earlier asserting that "the exit of the self (i.e. OBE) is experienced as liberation". The separate self - or what will be descriptively labelled the "essential self" - views the unconscious body and the events in the immediate environment "without interest and without regret."²⁹ Emotional reactions to being out of the body varied among Moody's experiencers with some initially feeling "a desperate desire to get back into their bodies." Others, as described above, were quite frightened, "almost panicky", while still others reported reactions that were more positive. These ranged from a sense of indifference towards the physical body to a joy associated with transcending it.³⁰ From Grey's research we learn that the NDE OBE was usually considered "quite natural".³¹ Nine (24%) of her 38 NDErs actually felt "detached and relaxed" during their OBEs.³²

In comparison, Ring observed that with the "sudden termination of bodily sensation (including, most importantly the cessation of pain)" there is usually a simultaneous commencement of emotions of "peace and well-being."³³ His findings agree with Moody's, in the sense that the emotional responses during the OBE do vary, "ranging from initial fear to the total absence of fear." The single most outstanding feature of the "mind state" during the NDE, according to Ring, is the "sense of observer-like detachment (i.e., OBE perceptions)", which is more often than not associated with the feeling that "all this is perfectly natural".³⁴

Brought out in most of these NDE studies is the point that the majority of NDErs come to an understanding that they have "left" their physical bodies. Many of these also report transcending their earthly, physical dimension altogether, typically beginning with entry into either a void or dark enclosed area (e.g. a "tunnel" or "cave"). This is considered by many of the researchers to be the third NDE stage. This "space" was usually described by Ring's experiencers as "very peaceful".³⁵ The NDEr's state of emotional tranquillity and peacefulness is maintained or intensified during this part of the NDE, largely due to his/her anticipation of confronting what is many times understood to be his/her destination. For example, Gallup observed that at the "end of the tunnel" there may be a "friendly being, or perhaps a pleasant peaceful bucolic scene" awaiting the experiencer.³⁶ Indeed, the encounter with this strange space is characteristically terminated with the movement towards and/or encounter with one or more of the following: a special "light", a

heaven-like realm, a being(s) of some kind, or even communication with "God". These, particularly experiences of the special NDE "light", are definitive phenomena of what some would identify as the fourth and fifth stages of the NDE. Ring provides quite specific information pertaining to this transitional aspect of the experience:

The passage from the third ("entering the dark") to the fourth stage ("seeing the light") of the core experience is marked by one singular feature: the appearance of light. It is usually described as a brilliant golden light. This light, however, hardly ever hurts one's eyes but is, on the contrary, very restful and comforting and, apparently, of ineffable beauty. Some of our respondents told me that they felt enveloped by this light and virtually all who experienced it felt drawn to it.³⁷

In relation to the emotional content of the NDE and its relationship to this NDE light, Grey's comments mirror Ring's: "many people report feeling enveloped by this light, and state that it is warm and uplifting, and of ineffable beauty."³⁸

Coincident with, or following, the experience of the NDE light NDErs sometimes enter an other-worldly realm, most typically likened to "heaven" or "paradise". Without exception this amplifies the positive emotional content of the NDE. In this context Hampe observed that "only this intensification of the experience of reality can provide a reason for the euphoric happiness of which the reports continually speak."³⁹ He makes this observation while giving account of his experiencers' descriptions of the magnificent colors, lights, landscapes, and sounds of a heavenly realm they

"visited". At this stage NDErs are typically in an emotional "state of felicity, a felicity which cannot be formulated in words."⁴⁰

Another relatively common phenomenon making up the NDE is the experience of one's life being "flashing before one's eyes" - popularly known as a life review. Hampe claims that this "life panorama" tends to "liberate" and "redeem" the NDEr, showing past events from the experient's life that were of great pleasure to him/her.⁴¹ Ring also found that the images making up the life review were usually "overwhelmingly positive in emotional tone."⁴² In those cases in which the life review explicitly included a critical element, experients invariably attributed all judgements of themselves to themselves. They customarily recounted experiencing unconditional love, being comforted and accepted by any "entity" present during their life reviews.⁴³

Even the termination of the NDE can be positive: Ring's data revealed that NDErs normally describe a "state of awe, wonder, comfort, and peace that...accompanies the decision to return to life."⁴⁴

Summary

Table XV summarises the quantitative data from each study, concerning the percentage of persons reporting the predominant emotional content of peace and painlessness during their NDE.

Table XV:
Predominant Emotional Content of
Peace and Painlessness During the NDE

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Sabom	100% (n=61)
Ring	98% (n=49)
Greyson	74% (n=183)
Lindley	74% (n=55)
Green	70% (n=50)
Grey	>50% (n=38)
Gallup	31% (n=79)
Greyson/Stevenson	28% (n=78)
Weighted Mean.....	<u>65%</u>

Although identified by some of the researchers as the first stage of the NDE, it has been briefly shown above that many definitive NDE phenomena contribute to the extremely positive emotional content of most NDEs. Upon the realisation that they have somehow left their physical bodies (and the corresponding pain), many NDErs experience a sense of detachment and liberation; a feeling that this is a perfectly natural state to be in - in some cases after a brief period of fear and/or puzzlement. The sense of well-being in the OBE may be maintained by an experience of going into, what Ring calls, a "very peaceful" space of some sort. Typically described as being dark, this area quite often becomes dimly lit by some distant source of light. During this transitional phase of the NDE, as the light becomes brighter, experiencers usually begin to feel uplifted and extraordinarily comforted. Many experience great peacefulness and joy as they interact with this unique light, which may then usher them into an incredibly beautiful, transcendent realm. A review of their lives may also take place at this stage, which is commonly

said to be a liberating and redeeming, not at all condemning, experience born of the images taken from the experient's life. Some NDErs also report that they felt a sense of peace and wonder even while the decision to leave the blissful NDE realm was being made. In a few cases NDErs did experience negative emotions at the end or after their experiences.

3.0 The Out-of-the-Body Experience (OBE)

In the following section experients' perceptions of existing outside of their physical bodies during their NDEs will be described. A general introduction to the OBE will be followed by four sub-sections, each focusing on specific NDE OBE characteristics: 1) the OBE and the form of the "essential self", 2) the OBE and the location of the essential self in autoscopic and combined NDEs, 3) awareness during the OBE, and 4) the NDE OBE and the transcendent NDE.

NDE researchers describe the OBE in terms of feelings and perceptions which lead the experient to believe that he/she is somehow detached from his/her physical body, existing outside of it. The actual process of separation from the physical body is seldom, if ever, remembered; one moment experients are "in" their physical bodies and the next they find themselves located somewhere outside of them.

For example, Greyson and Stevenson's NDE OBErs had the "impression of feeling or seeing" themselves outside of their physical bodies.⁴⁵ According to Ring, the definitive aspect of the NDE OBE is the "sense of being completely detached" from the physical body.⁴⁶ Such a

detachment was also present for 39 (71%) of the 55 NDE accounts in Lindley's study.⁴⁷ In these cases the experient's "awareness" moved spontaneously in the "external environment" independent of the body.⁴⁸ Every one of Sabom's NDErs described his/her NDE "as if it had taken place outside their physical body". They believed that the "'essential' part of themselves" - their "sole 'conscious' identity" - had become absolutely separate from their bodies.⁴⁹ Gallup also found that in the NDE OBE the "separate aspect" of the NDEr retained the "person's identity"⁵⁰, and many of Grey's experients were "convinced" that "their conscious memory and sense of personal identity survived" their apparent deaths.⁵¹ Throughout the remainder of this section, it should become thoroughly clear why the experient believes that his/her unique, personal identity continued to exist beyond what seems to be the death of his/her physical body.

3.1 The OBE and the Form of the "Essential Self"

Moody challenged many people with his seminal book on the NDE, not in the least by accounts of what the NDE "person" is during his/her OBE. The "majority" of his experients reported that they actually had "another body" during their NDEs:⁵²

despite its lack of perceptibility to people in physical bodies, all who have experienced it are in agreement that the spiritual body is...something....It is agreed that the spiritual body has a form or shape (sometimes a globular or an amorphous cloud, but also sometimes essentially the same shape as the physical body) and even parts (projections or surfaces analogous to arms, legs, a head, etc.). Even when its shape is reported as

being generally roundish in configuration, it is often said to have ends, a definite top and bottom, and even the "parts" just mentioned.

Words and phrases which have been used by various subjects include a mist, a cloud, smoke-like, a vapour, transparent, a cloud of colors, wispy, an energy pattern and others which express similar meanings.⁵³

In some of Hampe's accounts a "strange form" was reported, such that the OBE "self" was "perceptible, but...possessed no bodily appearance". It was described in various ways: "transparent, bluish in color", a "fluid body", or a "deep purple cloud of smoke".⁵⁴ Ring asked his NDErs specifically if they were aware of having another body during their OBEs. Most said that they had no such awareness or that they had become "mind only". Only two of his experiencers mentioned something vaguely resembling a "second body".⁵⁵ Similarly, only 7% of Sabom's non-surgical NDErs (4/61) gave descriptions of their essential self in terms of "features" which could be correlated with their physical bodies.⁵⁶ Grey's NDErs provided descriptions about the form of the OBE "self" primarily in terms of the non-earthly realm:

Although most of the core experiencers reported a sense of being completely detached from their bodies...they were nevertheless mostly aware of being in a form which they were clearly conscious of and which, as we will see during the next phase (the "Inner World"⁵⁷) was clearly recognizable to others (in the "inner world" experience)....⁵⁸

Fifty-eight percent (45/78) of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs felt that they had some kind of body which was not physical, yet was perceived to be the same size (68%, 31/45), and age (84%, 38/45) as their physical bodies. For some experiencers their nonphysical

body exhibited signs of physical life, e.g. a "pulse and breath" were reported by 67% (30/45) of those perceiving their nonphysical bodies.⁵⁹ In Green's study 66% reported an OBE as a part of their NDEs, expressing a definite belief that they were "something other than their physical bodies".⁶⁰ More specifically these experiencers felt that during their OBEs they either 1) existed purely as "mind", or 2) "had substance" such that their separate selves corresponded to their physical bodies almost identically.⁶¹

Deserving special notation is the claim by many NDEers that while they were out of their bodies their "spiritual body", as Moody put it, was free of the imperfection of their physical bodies. Whenever Green's experiencers claimed to have had a second body they also reported that its defects had disappeared.⁶² Twenty percent of Greyson and Stevenson's NDE OBEers claimed that their "sensorimotor or structural defects...(e.g. partial deafness, missing limbs)" were not present in their nonphysical bodies. Only 3% of all the NDEers in this study who perceived having a nonphysical body (45) reported that their physical defects were also still present.⁶³ Those who seemed to reach the "afterlife" realm among Gallup's experiencers sometimes found that their bodies had been "healed of whatever infirmity was bothering them"⁶⁴; they became completely free from any "physical defects".⁶⁵ Moody too found that the physical defects present in the physical bodies of many NDEers did not manifest themselves in their spiritual bodies.⁶⁶

Given the data presented above, the perception that the separate, NDE self does not consist of a material substance is not surprising. Ninety-three percent of

Sabom's NDErs experienced this essential self as an "invisible, nonmaterial reality"⁶⁷ with features which were "'visible' only to themselves."⁶⁸ Hampe also reported that in a number of cases a "strange, new bodily state was experienced, weightless and full of light."⁶⁹ Of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs who believed that they had had some kind of "nonphysical body" during their experiences 74% (33/45) also said that it was lighter than their physical bodies.⁷⁰

Ring's study agreed with these findings to a certain extent: 2% of his NDErs felt "heavy", none felt "normal", 27% felt "light", and 51% had no sense of a "body".⁷¹ However, in his concluding statement on this matter Ring tells us that of core experiencers who gave "definite replies" 97.4% felt that during their NDEs their "bodies" were indeed "light or absent".⁷² Grey's experiencers' separate selves were typically described as being "more etheric and less solid" than their physical bodies.⁷³ As usual, Moody was the first to identify the reported immaterial nature of the essential self, relating that his experiencers typically became aware of their new bodies due to limitations born of their immaterial nature. For example, NDErs consistently recounted that 1) no one in the vicinity of their unconscious physical bodies could hear or see them, 2) they had no affect on material objects, and 3) their equilibrium was sometimes confused since this new, weightless body tended to float.⁷⁴

3.2 The OBE and the Location of the Essential Self in Autoscopic and Combined NDEs

The essential self has been described above as being customarily in some "place" which is not normal for it to be in, i.e., not "in" the physical body. The distinctions which Sabom made concerning "autoscopic", "transcendent", and "combined" NDEs are especially helpful for the present examination of the NDE. Some NDErs experience an OBE only in terms of the "natural", immediate environment where their physical bodies are located, (i.e. autoscopic NDEs). Others report an OBE which takes place exclusively in an otherworldly dimension, (i.e. transcendent NDEs). There are also those who claim to have had an NDE OBE which begins in the natural, physical environment and then proceeds into an otherworldly dimension (i.e. combined NDEs). The data in this section relates to autoscopic and combined NDEs, since it is the earthly, physical location of the essential self which is the subject at hand.

Beginning with Sabom's data we see that 52% (32/61) of his non-surgical NDErs not only felt separate from their physical bodies but also perceived objects and events in the vicinity where their bodies were located.⁷⁵ In these cases the essential self was invariably positioned above the body, at a level "specifically identified (by the experiencers) as 'ceiling height'".⁷⁶ Like Sabom Hampe makes a distinction concerning the OBE in the NDE, although only some of his experiencers claimed that their "escaping self" maintained a specific and "constant" distance from their unconscious bodies.⁷⁷ In this position they reported seeing themselves below, at the spot where their close brush with death had taken

place.⁷⁸ It was also "typical" for Ring's NDErs to report "looking down" on the same scenes.⁷⁹ Again, in Green's study the OBE accounts given all show that the experiencers viewed their physical bodies from a vantage point located somewhere above their bodies.⁸⁰ Grey's NDErs tended to find themselves above their bodies, and, if the close brush with death took place within a room, "often in a corner".⁸¹ The "disembodied spirit(s)" of Gallup's experiencers were often located, predictably, "above the surrounding events and people".⁸² The majority of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs also described seeing their own bodies "as if from another point in space"⁸³, while Moody had reported the same characteristic of the NDE OBE before all of these researchers.⁸⁴

3.3 Awareness During the OBE

In the above presentation of NDE OBE data concerning both the form of the essential self and its location, experiencers' own reported perceptions were the only sources of information available. In this section the experiencer's perception, or awareness itself, during the NDE is described.

In the general introduction it was stated that Grey was one of the researchers whose experiencers believed their NDEs to be "real"; in fact they claimed to "feel as much alive as before" and many even said that they felt "more alive and more conscious" compared to when they were in their bodies.⁸⁵ Eight percent explicitly mentioned experiencing "heightened awareness" during their OBEs.⁸⁶ Gallup's experiencers also related that,

during their NDE OBEs, their "senses seemed to be heightened".⁸⁷ Many of the cases in Green's study included descriptions of a tremendous enhancement of "perceptual abilities" during the OBE as well.⁸⁸ When Greyson asked his subjects the question, "Were your senses more vivid than usual?", he received the following responses:

	<u>NDErs</u> <u>(n = 183)</u>	<u>non-NDErs</u> <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	34%	70%
2 More so than usual.	26%	17%
3 Incredibly more so.	40%	13%

Since the chi-squared measurement for this question was highly significant - $p. < 0.005$ - it can be said, confirming the observations above, that those persons who have an NDE during a close brush with death report an increase in the vividness of their senses at that time with a significantly higher frequency than those who had a close brush with death but no memory of an NDE.⁸⁹

Focusing more particularly on the ability to see and hear, it would seem that the essential self functions even "better" without physical eyes and ears. Moody explained that vision and hearing during the NDE OBE "seem actually heightened and more perfect than they are in physical life."⁹⁰ Sixteen (33%) of Ring's 48 core experiencers who had a "visually clear OBE" (48/49, 98%) were "aware of (having) acute hearing" as well. Significant visually, the OBE "environment" was often described by his NDErs as "very brightly illuminated".⁹¹

Grey recorded the exact same phenomenon along with the observation that during the NDE OBE her experients also had a more acute sense of hearing.⁹² While they were experiencing an OBE in the vicinity of their unconscious bodies, some spoke of seeing and hearing things in detail that could not have been perceived if they had been "in" their bodies, even if they had been physically conscious.⁹³ Over 50% of her respondents maintained that they had "visually clear OBEs"⁹⁴, while 21% of her NDErs remembered having a "clear view" of their bodies.⁹⁵ Seventy-one percent of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs also claimed to both hear and see persons physically present while they were out of their bodies.⁹⁶

Of Sabom's 61 NDErs 29 (48%) experienced "visualized details" that were "clear and distinct"⁹⁷, and 16 (26%) stated that they were able to listen to the conversations in the areas where their physical bodies were located.⁹⁸ Of Gallup's NDErs 23% reported "acute visual perceptions of (the) surroundings and events"⁹⁹ in the earthly and/or a "non-earthly realm". Seventeen percent heard the "audible" sounds of human voices¹⁰⁰, and in "a number of cases" autoscopic NDErs "heard voices from physicians, loved ones or others...and responded in some way to the audible comments and supplications."¹⁰¹ Further investigation into his NDErs' claims enabled Gallup to assert that in some cases the details given by the experients, of the events taking place while they were physically unconscious, had been "corroborated" by "witnesses" who were present during the experients' NDEs.¹⁰² It was also characteristic of Green's NDErs to recount seeing and hearing "clearly"

during their OBEs, often relating "detailed accounts" of the events which transpired at the time when they had been "apparently unconscious."¹⁰³

Thus far the phenomenon of awareness during the NDE OBE has been depicted in terms of experiencers' perceptions. A dramatic enhancement of cognition is also a common characteristic related to this special NDE awareness. "Over and over" Moody's NDErs told him that during their experiences they were able to "think more lucidly and rapidly than in physical existence".¹⁰⁴ Sixteen (33%) of Ring's 48 core NDErs experienced "sharp but detached mental processes" during their OBEs¹⁰⁵, while Sabom found that during the autoscopic stage of the NDE NDErs typically experienced "an amazing clarity of thought."¹⁰⁶ The perceptions of Gallup's experiencers occurred with a corresponding "mental clarity" that was "tremendous"¹⁰⁷, while Lindley's found that their "awareness" during their OBEs travelled at "incredible rates of speed".¹⁰⁸ Greyson asked his subjects specifically if their thoughts were speeded up during their close brush with death. Responses were given as follows:

	NDErs (n = 183)	non-NDErs (n = 63)
1 No.	56%	84%
2 Faster than usual.	16%	10%
3 Incredibly fast.	26%	6%

The chi-squared measurement for this question was significant; $p. < 0.01$.¹⁰⁹

Extra sensory perceptions during the NDE OBE were explicitly mentioned by a number of researchers. For example, in many of Green's cases there was an extraordinary enhancement of "perceptual abilities" which commonly included mysteriously knowing other peoples' thoughts and feelings.¹¹⁰ Three (9%) of the 32 experiencers in Sabom's study who reported autoscopic NDE phenomena said that they were able to move around via a kind of "thought travel".¹¹¹

Table XVI summarises the quantitative data concerning sensory awareness during the NDE OBE for those subjects labelled NDErs:

Table XVI: <u>The NDErs' Sensory Awareness</u>		
<u>Study</u>	<u>Phenomenon</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Ring	Visually clear	98% (n=49)
Greyson/ Stevenson	Visual/auditorial clear	71% (n=78)
Grey	Visually clear	>50% (n=38)
Sabom	Visually clear	48% (n=61)
Greyson	Incredibly more vivid senses	40% (n=183)
Ring	Acute hearing	33% (n=49)
Gallup	Acute visual perceptions	23% (n=79)
Weighted mean.....		<u>48%</u>

3.4 The NDE OBE and the Transcendent NDE

Information from four studies is briefly given here in order to portray the NDE OBE in relation to the transcendent NDE realm. Sabom classified 29 (48%) of his 61 NDErs as experiencers of "objects and events that 'transcend' or surpass our earthly limits"¹¹² compared to 20 (33%) who only experienced the natural, physical realm and 12 (20%) who experienced both "physical

objects and events" and an otherworldly dimension.¹¹³ Twenty-eight (46%) of his NDErs specifically encountered a "transcendental environment"; they had taken a "vivid out-of-body excursion - as if a brief sojourn had actually been taken to a physical location."¹¹⁴

Hampe also recognized that there were NDE OBES that were strictly transcendent in character, where "when the self leaves the body it moves freely in space and even outside the dying person's room", acquiring an "unhindered view of wider perspectives."¹¹⁵ Gallup introduced this aspect of the NDE with his "vestibule effect" concept:

the individual is beset by a definite sensation that he or she has moved from an ordinary, three-dimensional reality into another dimension, where the usual laws of time and space don't apply.¹¹⁶

In this position, where the NDEr is only in the "vestibule" of a transcendent realm, he/she continues to "participate in some way in the old earthly realm of time and space."¹¹⁷ The NDEr can still hear and see earthly activities, but as a detached observer.¹¹⁸ At some point this "transitional stage" ends with the experient's "awareness" being "more completely fixed in the afterlife". Here the experient is essentially unaware of what is taking place "back on earth."¹¹⁹ Some of Lindley's experients also found that their "awareness" travelled into "unrecognized areas of consciousness", which corresponded to a non-earthly, transcendent realm.¹²⁰

Summary

The NDE OBE is characterised by the perceived separation of the "essential part" of the experient's self from his/her physical body. This perception is usually correlated with a variety of phenomena, e.g., 1) an observable change in the experient's "form" by the experient him/herself, 2) the experient's awareness that his/her position in space has unexplainably changed, 3) a radical enhancement of the experient's sensual and cognitive awareness, and sometimes 4) an encounter with a non-physical, unearthly realm.

In reference to a change in form it was reported that the experient is invisible to other persons physically present and that his/her new form actually seems to be immaterial. If present, the new "body" is typically lighter than the physical one, and if not lighter then usually lacking mass completely. Sometimes the "essential self" takes the form of the physical body, although many experiencers describe themselves as having an amorphous shape. When this new form corresponds to the physical body it is not uncommon for it to lack the physical body's imperfections. In this disembodied state experiencers tend to find that they have no affect on material objects. Many other NDErs state that they existed simply as pure "mind", "consciousness", or "spirit". However, no matter what the form, during the NDE personal identity is invariably maintained.

For most NDErs who have a naturalistic, or autoscopic, NDE their separate selves are located above their physical bodies. Usually it is in this position that the experient inexplicably and suddenly finds him/herself - as a detached spectator - at the beginning

of the NDE. The experient's awareness during the OBE is sometimes enhanced, with the ability to see and hear, acutely, events going on in the vicinity. Ordinarily NDErs find that their cognitive powers are also greatly enhanced during their NDE OBEs, functioning with tremendous speed and clarity. Extra sensory perceptions may also take place, with some NDErs discovering that they can "hear" people's thoughts and know/sense their feelings as well.

NDErs may return to their physical bodies after experiencing only a few or many of these "autoscopic" NDE phenomena, while others progress into a kind of non-earthly realm. In other cases experients report experiencing this transcendent realm only. Transcendent NDE OBE phenomena may include a life review; an encounter with a being of light, "God", and/or other "spirits"; and/or an otherworldly environment.

The following table summarises the quantitative data for the frequency of the NDE OBE itself.

Table XVII:
The NDE OBE

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Sabom	100% (n=61)
Greyson/Stevenson	75% (n=78)
Lindley	71% (n=55)
Green	66% (n=50)
Greyson	55% (n=183)
Grey	>50% (n=38)
Ring	37% (n=102)
Gallup	26% (n=79)
Weighted mean.....	<u>61%</u>

4.0 The Darkness/Void Experience

As was noted above, at some point in the NDE the experient may find him/herself in a void or absolutely dark space, which is sometimes observed as being enclosed (e.g., a tunnel or cave). Usually this is reported to take place simultaneous to, or immediately following, the naturalistic NDE OBE. If the NDE progresses further, the darkness/void is often followed by some kind of transcendent real/experience.

Ring says that this darkness/void is usually described as being "completely black or dark, very peaceful, and, at least in the majority of such accounts, without dimensions."¹²¹ The popular conceptuality of a "tunnel" was not used by the majority of Ring's respondents, only 9 (8.8%) reported this phenomenon in similar terms (e.g., as a "funnel, pipe, culvert, and drum").¹²² In total 23% of Ring's respondents had an experience characterised as "a journey into a black vastness without shape or dimension."¹²³

In contrast, Moody described this NDE "element" as the "the dark tunnel", commenting that,

people have the sensation of being pulled very rapidly through a dark space of some kind. Many different words are used to describe this space. I have heard this space described as a cave, a well, a trough, an enclosure, a tunnel, a funnel, a vacuum, a void, a sewer, a valley, and a cylinder.¹²⁴

Gallup also reported that 8% of his NDErs experienced the "perception of a tunnel" during their close brushes with death.¹²⁵ Twenty-one (38%) of the 55 testimonies

making up Lindley's study contained an experience of this "darkness", "void", or "tunnel".¹²⁶ Greyson and Stevenson found as well that 31% of their NDErs had the impression of "passing through a tunnel or similar structure."¹²⁷ Reporting on this phenomenon, Hampe writes of a "space which is not experienced as space at all", of which the NDEr has very little, if any, awareness pertaining to "dimensions and character."¹²⁸

Grey labels this aspect of the NDE "entering darkness". Thirteen percent of her NDErs reported it as being "dimensionlessness" in contrast to the 26% which spoke of a "tunnel sensation".¹²⁹ In support of Ring's findings Grey noted that some of her respondents likened this to their concepts of "outer space".¹³⁰ In Green's study this phenomenon was pictured in a similar fashion, as a "dark dimensionless space or void."¹³¹ Even though the "tunnel" was the most frequently used term employed by the 32% of NDErs who had this experience "many" simply stated that they had been in "an extremely dark place."¹³² All 23% (14/61) of Sabom's nonsurgical NDErs who related entering a "dark region or void"¹³³ characterised it as taking place at the beginning of their transcendental NDEs; this was followed by an experience of transcendental and/or otherworldly phenomena. Thus Sabom believed this to be a transitional phase of the NDE.¹³⁴ Ring had already stated a few years earlier that this "stage of the experience seems to be a transitional one between this world and whatever may be said to lie beyond....Most people have the sense of floating or drifting through it, though a few respondents reported that they felt they were moving very rapidly in this space."¹³⁵ As we

have already seen, Moody's NDErs also told him of being "pulled" rapidly through this space.¹³⁶ Ring concluded that whether there was mention of movement or not, the experience of this darkness/void affirms that an "encounter (with) very non-ordinary realms of consciousness" has begun for the experient.¹³⁷

In addition, Lindley noted that the darkness/void experience "apparently...is an intermediate stage as the awareness shifts from the external environment to the inner setting."¹³⁸ The "inner setting" was said to be synonymous with the transcendent realm that many NDErs describe as "paradise" and/or the place where an encounter with non-earthly beings takes place.¹³⁹ Grey too found that this experience "appears to be a passage to another 'state of being'".¹⁴⁰ During this stage of the NDE some of her NDErs experienced the feeling of being "drawn to an opening"¹⁴¹: 8% reported a sense of "floating or drifting" and 26% a sense of "very rapid movement".¹⁴² "Most" of Green's NDErs said they were "definitely moving" through this space, which was described predominantly as "floating or spinning".¹⁴³ A "persistently recurring experience of weightless floating" in a space without dimension and character was also present in many of Hampe's accounts.¹⁴⁴

Summary

The following table represents the frequency of NDE darkness/void phenomenon for those studies which provided the relevant statistical information.

Table XVIII:
The NDE Darkness/Void Phenomenon

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Lindley	38% (n=55)
Green	32% (n=50)
Greyson/Stevenson	31% (n=78)
Sabom	23% (n=61)
Grey	20% (n=38)
Gallup	8% (n=79)
Weighted mean.....	<u>25%</u>

In summarising the information above, it can be said that the popular notion of travelling through a "tunnel" during an NDE can be misleading. Ring, Moody, Lindley, Hampe, and Sabom all make it clear that for the majority of their NDErs "tunnel" would not be an accurate descriptive term for the unusual "space" or "void" they found themselves in during their experiences, usually following autoscopic NDE phenomena. In each of the studies which included more than a passing treatment of this NDE phenomenon the words "dark", "dimensionless", and "void" were predominant. It is commonly reported by NDErs that they felt themselves floating, drifting, and/or being pulled through this space, sometimes very rapidly. This movement normally facilitates a transition from the natural/physical world into some kind of transcendent realm/experience.

5.0 The Light

One of the most important constitutive NDE phenomenon is the experience of a rather unique light. This NDE light is described as being significant in

terms of 1) signalling a transition from the darkness/void into a transcendent realm/experience, 2) its visual and affective qualities, and 3) its interactive role in association with various transcendent NDE phenomena. Each of these points will be discussed in detail below.

5.1 The light as Signalling a Transition

Ring states that the transition from the third NDE stage ("entering the dark") to the fourth ("seeing the light") is "marked by one singular feature: the appearance of light."¹⁴⁵ This is sometimes described quite simply as a slow brightening of the darkness/void by an approaching and/or expanding light. Moody said that in its initial appearance the special NDE light is usually "dim" but that it quickly becomes "brighter until it reaches an unearthly brilliance."¹⁴⁶ As mentioned above, another, more "detailed", way in which the light is experienced as a transition has to do with the experient's movement through the darkness/void towards it as it appears in the distance.¹⁴⁷ Invariably the light has a magnetic effect: Ring states, "virtually all who experienced it (i.e. the light) felt drawn to it."¹⁴⁸ Summarising his own observations Ring observed that his NDErs perceived this special light "phenomenologically, if not ontologically", as signifying the "termination of the experience of dying and the beginning of new life."¹⁴⁹ Statistically, 33% of his core experiencers had had some such encounter with this light.¹⁵⁰

The movement from darkness to light was understood by many of Grey's NDErs as "heralding the dawn of a new state of existence."¹⁵¹ In terms of what was above depicted as being the "slow brightening of the darkness/void" Grey says that 21% of her NDErs saw first a "distant point of light" and 5% reported feeling a "magnetic pull" towards it.¹⁵² In a more descriptive comment Grey says that "many respondents felt that the light was somehow symbolic, that it was the precursor of glad tidings, a 'messenger of joy', proclaiming an end to the time of darkness and offering the promise of the dawn of new life."¹⁵³

Similarly Sabom also recognized that for some of his experiencers the initial appearance of light signalled the end of the darkness/void experience and the beginning of the otherworldly or transcendent realm/experience. Seventeen (28%) of his nonsurgical NDErs reported this phenomenon, including movement towards the light as the NDE progressed.¹⁵⁴ Green states as well that for those persons who had had a "tunnel" experience there would "often" be a light at the end extending into it. In agreement with the findings of Ring, Grey, and Sabom this study also revealed that experiencers remembered "feeling drawn to the light or knowing that the light was their destination."¹⁵⁵ Actually, the relationship between the light and the darkness/void, especially as a "tunnel" type of structure, seems to be principally transitional in nature, as Green and his colleagues were to find out:

The tunnel experiences we did uncover were almost always in connection with seeing the light and, less frequently, with entering the light. In fact, many of our respondents appeared to provide the analogy of a tunnel

only after seeing the light at the end. On the other hand, many of our respondents reported experiencing a light without going through a tunnel or dark area.¹⁵⁶

5.2 Qualities of the Light

One of the definitive qualities of the light is its incredibly brilliant, yet non-blinding, radiance. For Ring's experiencers the light was usually a "brilliant golden" which "almost never" hurt their eyes. "Restful" and "comforting" is how these experiencers described their encounters with this light of "ineffable beauty".¹⁵⁷ Moody had made similar observations four years earlier, writing that this light of "indescribable brilliance" did not hurt or "dazzle" most experiencers' eyes or prevent them from "seeing other things around them."¹⁵⁸ Fifty-six percent of the NDE testimonies in Lindley's study recount an encounter with a light which was almost always perceived as being "brilliant white or golden", and only rarely pink or blue. Most of these experiencers also felt that the light was "impersonal, though warm and compassionate".¹⁵⁹

Among Sabom's experiencers this light was frequently likened to the "brightness of the sun or the beauty of a sunset."¹⁶⁰ Consistent with data already given Grey's experiencers portrayed the NDE light as usually being "very brilliant white or golden" and only sometimes "blue".¹⁶¹ Sixteen percent of her respondents said that this was a "blinding light" which did not hurt their eyes and 26% that the light was ineffably beautiful.¹⁶² Similarly, the 62% of Green's NDErs who encountered this "brilliant light" also emphasised the fact that it did not impair their sight in any way.¹⁶³ As stated above,

14% of Gallup's experiencers reported the presence of a special type of light or lights during their NDEs. Going into more detail, Gallup recorded that sometimes the light is "soft and comforting" while at others times it is "brilliant and blinding".¹⁶⁴

Greyson and Stevenson did not provide qualitative data relating to the NDE light, only that "unusual visual phenomena (e.g. lights, auras)" were reported by 48% of their NDEers.¹⁶⁵ A decade later Greyson's survey returned a highly significant chi-squared measurement for the following question, "Did you see or feel surrounded by a brilliant light?":¹⁶⁶

	<u>NDEers</u> <u>(n = 183)</u>	<u>non-NDEers</u> <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	28%	94%
2 Unusually bright light.	26%	6% ¹⁶⁷
3 Light clearly of mystical or other- worldly origin.	46%	0

5.3 Interaction with the Light

5.3.1. The Light as Personal

Thus far the special NDE light has been characterised as 1) being a significant factor in the NDEr's transition from the earthly context of their "death" to the context of a transcendent realm, and 2) having a tremendous radiance which is beautiful, non-blinding, and extremely comforting. Interaction with

this light can even surpass, though, such phenomena in the sense that the light takes on its own personality.

For instance, some of Ring's NDErs claimed that the light embraced or "enveloped them".¹⁶⁸ Thirty-nine percent of Grey's NDErs also spoke of being "enveloped" by the NDE light.¹⁶⁹ This may help us to better understand the relatively unusual observation made by Hampe, as pointed out above, that the essential self itself is, in some cases, reported to be "full of light."¹⁷⁰ He goes on to say, that "if we may be allowed to trust our reports, we shall also enter into the light."¹⁷¹ Indeed, 18% of Green's respondents did claim to have entered the light¹⁷², although "many" claimed to approach the light without actually entering it. Still others said that the light was "all around them", although they were not certain if this meant "being in it".

Moody discovered that although the light was of an "unusual manifestation" not a single one of his experiencers doubted that the light "was a being, a being of light."¹⁷³ That the light was a "personal being", that it emanated "love and warmth", and that there was an "irresistible magnetic attraction" to it are all points which Moody said were consistently made by those who experienced it. Descriptions varied concerning the identity of the being of light, which Moody concluded is a "function of the religious background, training, or beliefs of the person involved."¹⁷⁴ Hence, "most" of his Christian NDErs identified the light with Jesus Christ. Some others used "biblical parallels" to support their "interpretation", while a Jewish experiencer believed that the being of light was an "angel". Moody made the

important point that experiencers do not necessarily report having seen the light in a specific form per se, but simply understand, intuitively, that the light represents a particular being.¹⁷⁵ What each experiencer was "trying to get across" was that the light was an "emissary, or a guide." Communication with the being of light was not in the form of "audible sounds" but via what could be described as mental telepathy.¹⁷⁶ The content of the communication itself tended to centre on the experiencer's readiness to die or not, e.g. the being of light asked one experiencer "Are you prepared to die?" and another, "What have you done with your life to show me?"¹⁷⁷ "Condemnation" according to Moody, is not the point of the question; it is a type of prompt for experiencers to "think about their lives".¹⁷⁸

Some of Grey's NDErs also believed that the NDE light was a "living light", several did in fact encounter it as a "being of light".¹⁷⁹ Gallup too found that "on occasion" this special NDE light was "connected with some sort of being or a group of beings in the extradimensional sphere."¹⁸⁰ Ring noted that encounters with "religious figures" were quite rare¹⁸¹, but that when they were reported experiencers commonly said that "light radiated from them".¹⁸² Ring's "religious" NDErs interpreted the light as a "visual manifestation of God."¹⁸³ Two (3%) of Sabom's NDErs also believed that this light was "the spirit of a person or a religious figure."¹⁸⁴ In contrast, as we saw above, most of Lindley's NDErs who experienced this special light described it as being impersonal, even though it was also felt to be "compassionate".¹⁸⁵

5.3.2. The light and the Otherworldly Realm

In a more general type of interaction, this special NDE light is portrayed in the context of its presence as the illumination for many NDE transcendent phenomena. For instance, Gallup's research led him to the conclusion that "in almost every case where it is mentioned, the light becomes a highly important part of the scene that the individual encounters".¹⁸⁶ Grey made a similar observation:

From this point on (i.e., after the initial perception of the light while the experient was in the region of darkness/void), the light no longer served as a guide nor enveloped the experiencer in a warm and glowing radiance. It now illuminated the 'world within'...and was understood to be the source from which all life and love springs.¹⁸⁷

When they entered the otherworldly realm, or "inner world" as Grey puts it, her NDErs understood that this was the place where the special light had its "origin".¹⁸⁸ Ring had said essentially the same thing 5 years earlier, stating that the distinction between simply seeing the light and entering the light was "the difference between seeing the light and entering into a 'world' in which the light appears to have its origin."¹⁸⁹

Those NDErs in Green's study who did not report a "tunnel experience", yet did encounter a "brilliant light", had also entered into "an area that was highly illuminated." He noted that some NDErs remembered that the light did not appear to have a source.¹⁹⁰ Could it be that Ring and Grey's observation, that the origin of the NDE light is the otherworldly realm, is connected

with Green's "highly illuminated" area? It is possible that Green's "highly illuminated" area, without a "source" of light, could be the same "place" as Grey's otherworldly realm, where the source of light seems to be missing as well - at least in an earthly sense. They both had posited that the light of this place is the same as the light which was perceived in the dimensionless expanse of the void.

In terms of the life review, which is considered by many of the researchers to be part of the "otherworldly realm", Hampe wrote that it is this special NDE light which is "poured over the reanimated past."¹⁹¹ In a not unrelated observation Moody had stated above that quite often it was the "being of light" which triggered the life review by prompting the experient to examine his/her life.¹⁹²

It is worth mentioning here that none of Green's respondents both "entered the light" and experienced a "beautiful pastoral setting" - it was either one or the other, not both.¹⁹³ In this study the judgement was made that the "component" labelled "entering the light" - a category borrowed from Ring's NDE measurement device - would be best broken into two separate phenomena. Thus, some of the respondents related an experience of "entering a light and becoming one with the light"¹⁹⁴, while the remainder - who should have been classified as "entering the light", since this study was a comparative one with Ring's - encountered "beautiful pastoral settings" where they had a "total sensory experience."¹⁹⁵

Summary

The NDE light is usually encountered first as a signal for the completion of the darkness/void experience, where an initially dim light becomes brighter and brighter until it is brilliant in its radiance. Because of the light's magnetic quality, movement in the darkness/void is almost always towards it. This movement towards the light is many times understood to represent a transition from dying to the beginning of a new state of being, i.e., new life. The light itself is described as being incredibly brilliant and beautiful, although, in most cases, its blinding radiance does not hurt the experient's eyes or impede his/her vision. Most often it is golden or white and commonly has a positive affective quality which facilitates feelings of comfort, rest, and/or warmth.

Interaction characteristically begins with the experient being embraced or surrounded by the light. In many cases it is understood to be personal; a being of light. Without exception this being, or sometimes beings, functions as a loving, compassionate, and wise guide or emissary, which is perceived to be from an otherworldly or spiritual realm. In some cases this being is believed to be a religious figure, e.g., God, Jesus, or an angel. Communication between the light and the experient has been described as a kind of direct thought transfer, in which cases experients are often prompted to reflect on whether or not they should or should not return to physical existence. This decision is sometimes made in the context of a review of their lives or an encounter with a transcendent realm. In

many cases the light is understood to be instrumental in facilitating the life review and/or illuminating the transcendent realm, from which many NDErs believe the light has its origin.

A statistical summary of the occurrence of the NDE light phenomenon is given in Table XIX.

Table XIX:
The NDE Light Phenomenon

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Green	62% (n=50)
Lindley	56% (n=55)
Greyson/Stevenson	48% ¹⁹⁶ (n=78)
Greyson	46% (n=183)
Ring	33% (n=48)
Sabom	28% (n=61)
Grey	25% (n=38)
Gallup	14% (n=79)
Weighted mean.....	<u>40%</u>

6.0 The Transcendent Realm/Experience

The purpose of this section is to give a concise description of those NDE phenomena which experients specifically identified as being non-earthly or transcendent in nature. These will be categorised into four sections: 1) union with the light, 2) non-physical entities, 3) the life review, and 4) the transcendent, otherworldly setting. Such phenomena are normally not mutually exclusive, nonetheless these four categories are employed in an attempt to present the best picture possible of each phenomenon. Most of the ten studies used to formulate this typology of the NDE offered this data in a similar fashion, although most also recognized that these phenomena tend to overlap.

In the discussion of the OBE above the idea was introduced that a large percentage of NDErs, as essential selves, encounter some kind of non-earthly space and/or realm.¹⁹⁷ Generally speaking, the relationship between the darkness/void experience and a transcendent experience in the NDE begins with the sense of movement in the darkness/void realm, which, almost without exception, leads to an experience of some kind of transcendental entity and/or realm.¹⁹⁸ We recall that the NDE "light" characteristically draws the NDEr into the next phase of his/her experience.¹⁹⁹ However, this light not only draws the NDEr into a transcendent realm/experience, but is commonly perceived to be the experient's destination.²⁰⁰ Thus, there is often reported a subsequent, transforming communion with the light itself. At this point in the NDE non-physical entities may also be encountered, a life review may take place, and/or a heaven-like, pastoral area entered. It should be kept in mind though that such transcendent experiences do not necessarily depend upon an initial encounter with the special NDE light.

6.1 Union with the Light

In the previous section it was observed that 1) the special NDE light usually has a magnetic quality, and 2) entering into this light is a significant phenomenon in a great number of NDEs. Moody highlights the interactive significance of the being of light in the following passage:

The love and the warmth which emanate from this being (of light) to the dying person are utterly beyond words, and he feels completely surrounded by it and taken up in it,

completely at ease and accepted in the presence of this being.²⁰¹

The impact of such an encounter can be both emotionally transforming and cognitively enlightening.²⁰² It is typically expressed that, as "alive" and "personal", the light *communes* rather than simply communicates with the experient.²⁰³ For example, Green found that the encounter with the NDE light sometimes even facilitated a profound epistemological experience:

Some of our respondents reported entering a light and becoming one with the light. In so doing they were in a state of all-knowing in which they intuitively knew or were made aware of the meaning of life as well as many other things.²⁰⁴

The researchers have made it quite clear that, without fail, entering or being enveloped by this light is an extremely positive, transcendent experience.

6.2 Non-physical Entities

Many times experiencers report encountering non-physical entities during their NDEs, in most cases in the middle or at the end of their experiences, yet occasionally an NDEr will experience this phenomenon at the beginning. Invariably these entities function as guides, either helping experiencers make a decision whether or not to return to their physical lives or plainly informing them that they have no choice but to return. Some of these entities are seen, others may only be heard, and still others are intuitively sensed. The non-visualized entities will be considered below in

the sub-section "The Presence" and all the others within that entitled "Other beings".

6.2.1. The Presence

During their NDEs 20 (41%) of Ring's 49 core experiencers became "aware" of a "presence"²⁰⁵, which was "never actually seen" but was simply "sensed, inferred or intuited." In some cases this presence was heard to speak while in others communication was likened to a direct "mental understanding". The gender of the presence was identifiable when an audible voice was perceived²⁰⁶: six of the experiencers claimed to hear a male voice and two a female voice, although none of the respondents were able to identify the voice with any known person.²⁰⁷ In reality "quite a few" believed that in their encounters with the presence they had been in direct communication with "God".²⁰⁸ It was customary for the presence to inform the experiencer that he/she was at a critical point in his/her life and that he/she had to decide whether or not to return to physical life. At this stage the presence encouraged experiencers to "reflect" upon or "reexperience" their lives, which sometimes would take the form of a life review.²⁰⁹

Three (10%) of Grey's 32 NDErs who had a "boundary" experience encountered it in terms of a presence. These NDErs' experiences of the presence were most significant in relation to its influence on their returning or not to physical existence.²¹⁰ Twenty-eight (46%) of Sabom's NDErs perceived the "nearness of some other personage", which were identified as either a "nonvisual 'Presence' or a visualized 'spirit'". Again, the content of

communication with these entities was always centred on the subject of the experient's return.²¹¹ In his description of such encounters Sabom makes no clear differentiation between the presence and other NDE entities, focusing primarily on what seems to be, relative to the descriptions of the other major researchers, visualized beings. For this reason the remainder of Sabom's data which are relevant to these phenomena will be treated in the next section, "Other beings".

"Quite a few" of Moody's experients said that they had become "aware of the presence of other spiritual beings in their vicinity", which tended to be understood according to their function of easing the experient "through their transition into death".²¹² Green presents 2 (4%) accounts which include the experients' awareness of a presence. In one case the presence sends the NDEr back to his physical body, and in the other it is a comforting guide.²¹³ However, there may well have been more experiences of the presence among this study population, for such encounters were not handled by Green's study per se.

Similar to both Moody and Green's studies, Gallup offers very little information on the NDE presence itself. Within his section "The Population of the Afterlife" he states that a "powerful presence, a dominant being or group of beings" were reported in a "number of cases". Although he does say that such entities are typically perceived to be "in charge, directing or advising the person to understand certain things", he doesn't provide any information on the "powerful presence" itself. It can be said though that

it was understood in some cases that the presence was a important part of a spiritual hierarchy in the non-earthly, transcendent realm.²¹⁴

The hearing of voices as "revelations" during their experiences seems to have been relatively common among Hampe's experiencers, although such auditory phenomena were much less frequent than those which were visual. "Words and comprehensible ideas" were seldom recounted by these experiencers; even the substance of the communication seemed to be of a transcendent nature. In the one example which Hampe gives of a voice being heard the experiencer is informed that she must return to her physical life, even though she does not want to. Generally though, these "revelations" from unseen, non-earthly entities impart knowledge to the experiencer not only about themselves but, about the mysteries of the world as well.²¹⁵

In his comparative study Greyson presented his study population with the question, "Did you seem to encounter a mystical presence or being?" Evidencing once again the great difference between those who had an NDE and those who did not during a close brush with physical death, the chi-squared measurement for this question was highly significant; $p. < 0.005$:²¹⁶

	NDers (n = 183)	non-NDers (n = 63)
1 No.	41%	95%
2 Uniden- tifiable voice.	9%	3%
3 Definite being, or voice clearly of mystical or otherworldly origin.	50%	2% ²¹⁷

6.2.2. Other Beings

Many of Moody's NDers told him of their meetings with "spiritual beings" which occurred sometimes "early" in their NDEs and other times after various NDE phenomena had already been experienced. "Apparently", as we have pointed out several times above, these beings were there to aid the person in their "transition into death" or to inform the experient that his/her "time to die" had not yet come.²¹⁸ In many cases the "spirits" were not individuals which the experients had known, even though deceased loved ones and/or acquaintances were encountered in at least two of Moody's cases.²¹⁹ In "very few instances" Moody's NDers encountered what they perceived to be "guardian spirits".²²⁰

Sixteen percent (8/49) of Ring's core experiencers encountered "'spirits' of dead loved ones, usually relatives", which, most of the time, were both seen and heard.²²¹ This "apparent reunion" was one of surprise and happiness for the experient, who was typically greeted in a "friendly fashion".²²² Repeatedly the

communication between the NDEr and these spirits focused on the experient's return to physical existence. In contrast though to the free choice usually given to the experient by the presence, it is almost always the case that these entities urge the experient to return, communicating "'it isn't your time yet"; "'you must go back;".²²³ Ring also discovered that none of his NDErs encountered both the presence and a "deceased loved one" - it was always "either one or the other".²²⁴

Among those experients in Grey's study who encountered a "boundary" phenomenon, 31% (10/32) reported it as a "meeting with deceased 'spirits'".²²⁵ According to Hampe it is in the context of the "life panorama" - which is also considered a "boundary" phenomenon by Grey - that the NDEr meets "people, usually his nearest and dearest."²²⁶ Forty-nine percent of Greyson and Stevenson's 78 NDErs met "person(s) not physically present", including 1) a "being of light" (27%), 2) religious figures (25%), 3) deceased acquaintances (16%), 4) living acquaintances (14%), and 5) unidentified strangers (26%). Thirty-nine percent of their NDErs also described how they had communicated with such entities in terms of "extrasensory experiences".²²⁷ Moody too reported that during the transcendent stage of the NDE this was the method of communication between experients and other beings.²²⁸

As was stated in the previous section, 28 (46%) of Sabom's non-surgical NDErs perceived a non-visualized presence and/or visualized entities during their NDEs.²²⁹ Twenty-one (35%) of these communicated with the entity. In 12 cases the communication was "verbal"; in 4 "nonverbal 'telepathy'"; in 2 "nonverbal gestures (e.g.

'outstretched arms', 'waving of the hands'); and in 3 a combination of both the verbal and the nonverbal. Once again, it was found that the content of the communication "most frequently" centred on whether or not the experient would "die" or "'return' to the physical body and live."²³⁰ During 15 (25%) NDEs a "visually perceived spiritual being appeared", of which half were reported to be "deceased relatives" who appeared to be "happy, content and in good health".²³¹ In 4 (7%) cases both "religious figures and deceased acquaintances" were encountered.²³²

Gallup's subjects gave "rather specific" accounts of a "feeling that a special being or beings were present" during their NDEs: 23% met "special being(s)", which they "sometimes" identified as "dead relatives", an angel(s), or Jesus Christ.²³³ In another section of his work Gallup also reports, as shown above, that in the "Afterlife setting" a good number of these were described in "traditional religious terms"; some were understood to be "on a level of God; some on a secondary level of divine assistants (or what some might traditionally call angels) and some on a level of demons and devils."²³⁴ It is primarily in this afterlife context that Gallup's experients saw and communicated with their deceased relatives.²³⁵ Generally, many of these afterlife beings had a "helping, nurturing, guiding or warning function", while others acted as "decision-makers" exercising a particular "benevolent but absolute power over the destiny of the person."²³⁶

Similarly it was not uncommon for Lindley's experients to consult "guides" about returning to physical existence; 5 (9%) actually described "tribunal"

type experiences in reference to being sent back to physical life.²³⁷ Of Green's NDErs 24 (48%) viewed the "spirits of dead relatives or friends, or of religious figures or beings" and/or heard the voices of "deceased persons or spiritual beings".²³⁸ We are told that a feeling of "familiarity" typically characterised such encounters.²³⁹

Greyson also asked his participants about their experiences with NDE entities. Specifically, he inquired "Did you see deceased spirits or religious figures?" His respondents answered in the following ways:

	NDErs <u>(n = 183)</u>	non-NDErs <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	64%	94%
2 Sensed their presence.	11%	6%
3 Saw them.	25%	0

The chi-squared measurement for this question was highly significant; $p. < 0.005$.²⁴⁰

6.2.3. Summary

Ring, Grey, Sabom, Hampe, Moody, Green, Gallup and Hampe all found that some of their experiencers encountered a non-visualized presence of some sort. The presence, in all the studies, functioned primarily as an authoritative guide, usually informing experiencers that they were at a critical moment in their lives and that they had to make a choice to return to physical existence or not. It was only rarely that the presence

sent the experient back without any choice being given. Communication with this presence was sometimes audible, but it usually was described as being telepathic in nature. Although this presence was not visually perceived, most NDErs believed it to be a religious or spiritual figure.

Visualized spiritual beings encountered in the NDE were reported more frequently and in greater detail than the NDE presence. For instance, deceased relatives and loved ones were met in approximately half of all encounters with visualized non-physical beings. Typically, they were said to be friendly and happy to be reunited with the experient. Other beings were identified as deceased acquaintances, religious figures, guardian spirits, and/or spiritual guides. The topic of communication invariably focused on the subject of whether or not the NDEr would return to physical existence. In contrast to the encounter with the presence, in most of these cases the other beings related to the experient that it was not his/her time to die; that he/she had no choice but to return. The following three tables provide summaries for the available statistical data which was given concerning the phenomena described in this section.

Table XX:
Perception of a "Presence" in the NDE

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Ring	41% (n=49)
Grey	8% (n=38)
Weighted mean.....	<u>26%</u>

Table XXI:
Perception of Visualized,
Non-Physical Beings in the NDE

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Grey	26% (n=38)
Greyson	25% (n=183)
Ring	16% (n=49)
Sabom	25% (n=61)
Weighted mean.....	<u>24%</u>

Table XXII:
Perception of Non-Visualized and/or
visualized Non-Physical Beings in the NDE

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Ring	71% (N=49)
Greyson	59% (n=183)
Greyson/Stevenson	49% (n=78)
Green	48% (n=50)
Sabom	46% (n=61)
Grey	34% (n=38)
Gallup	23% (n=79)
Weighted mean.....	<u>49%</u>

6.3 The Life Review

Touched on in several sections above we now turn to the NDE phenomenon known as the "life review", where NDErs experience a review of their lives typically in the form of vivid images. This transcendent phenomenon almost always takes place at the end of the NDE, for, when it is present, it usually plays a critical role in the decision of whether or not the experient will return to physical life.²⁴¹

In terms of what "triggers" this phenomenon, Ring discovered that the "panoramic life review" was disproportionately reported by those experients whose

NDEs were caused by a sudden accident, in contrast to an illness or suicide attempt. Fifty-five percent of his accident triggered NDEs contained a life review, compared to only 16% in the other two categories combined.²⁴² Hampe also found that the life review was recounted "especially" by NDErs who experienced a "swift, violent death".²⁴³

The life review for Ring's NDErs was experienced in the form of "vivid images"²⁴⁴, which were even more intense for those experiencers whose NDEs were triggered by an accident.²⁴⁵ The analogy of "watching a movie" of one's life was specifically used, and sometimes implied, by a number of his experiencers.²⁴⁶ NDErs who had life reviews in Green's study also described them in terms of "vivid images"²⁴⁷ which seemed to flash in front of them.²⁴⁸ Hampe stated that the "extreme vividness" of the life review was accompanied by a remarkable "clarity" of thought.²⁴⁹ His NDErs believed that their life reviews were a "directly viewed reality"; "everything seems to the dying person" to be precisely as it happened in their past, e.g., "everyone talks just as he (the experiencer) heard them talk in life."²⁵⁰ All of Moody's NDErs who experienced this phenomenon described it as a "display of visual imagery...(which was) incredibly vivid and real". For some of the experiencers the images were not only vivid but "vibrant (in) color, three-dimensional, and even moving".²⁵¹

Although the extreme vividness of the life review is consistently reported, its range appears to be relatively variable. Some of Ring's NDErs re-experienced their whole lives, while others re-experienced only "selected aspects".²⁵² In some cases

experiencers believed that the images were even "selectively edited".²⁵³ For those experiencers whose NDEs were triggered by an accident, the life review was also more "extensive" than those whose NDE was triggered by illness or suicide attempt.²⁵⁴

Sabom too identified the element of selectivity in the life review, affirming that it was comprised of "significant past life events".²⁵⁵ Hampe found the same thing at least five years earlier, explaining that this phenomenon represented a "remarkable review and selection of what had been most important" in the experiencers' lives even though "they had never been conscious of this earlier."²⁵⁶ Concerning this subject Gallup simply said that a review of the "individual's past life" took place for 31% of his NDErs.²⁵⁷ Some of Moody's NDErs re-experienced every part of their lives no matter how insignificant, while others claimed that they only perceived the "highlights".²⁵⁸

Along with the range the life review's sequence also seems to be variable, although the speed with which NDErs experience the images is always the same. According to Ring, the "nearly instantaneous visual images" of the life review "usually appear in no definite sequence (though they sometimes do), but rather as a simultaneous matrix of impressions, like a hologram."²⁵⁹ Some experiencers, describing the review in terms of a movie, stated that it could be viewed "in a matter of seconds"²⁶⁰; the life review images are "processed" at a "tremendous rate".²⁶¹ Among the 27% (21/78) of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs who reported a life review, memories "usually appeared 'all at once' (38%, 8/21) and not in any particular sequence."²⁶² In

contrast, Hampe tells us that the "comforting pictures supplied by the memory lead from the present progressively backwards through the years, right to earliest childhood."²⁶³ In this context Sabom simply recounted that his NDErs experienced this phenomenon as "a rapid mental replay."²⁶⁴ For Green's NDErs the images progressed "in very rapid sequence".²⁶⁵ Gallup too found that the life review took place "in a brief, highly compressed period of time"²⁶⁶. From his experiential accounts Gallup concludes that "many more things passed through their minds in a short period of time than would be possible under normal circumstances"²⁶⁷. Apparently his NDErs also believed that they had had no control whatsoever over this phenomenon.²⁶⁸ For some of Moody's NDErs the life review also progressed in an "extraordinarily rapid" way; sometimes the "remembrance was instantaneous; everything appeared at once" and at others, the life review finished "in an instant of earthly time." Usually, but not always, the life review was said to unfold in a "chronological order", for some were not aware at all of a "temporal" succession of images/events.²⁶⁹

Already touched upon in a number of places above, we recall that the emotional impact of the life review is primarily positive. For example Ring had stated that it was "overwhelmingly positive in emotional tone"²⁷⁰, and Hampe that it tended to "liberate" and "redeem" the NDEr, via a type of re-experiencing of pleasurable events from the past.²⁷¹ He describes the life review in terms of "comforting pictures supplied by the memory"²⁷² which take the experiencer on a journey all the way back to his/her beginnings, and thus, to a type of re-entry

into the "Garden of Eden".²⁷³ Moody too found that in many cases it was not just the images from the NDEr's life which were experienced but the "emotions and feelings" associated with them as well.²⁷⁴

Turning our attention to interaction in the context of the life review we take note first of Moody's comment that the life review was routinely, though not always²⁷⁵, encountered in relation to the NDE "being of light". Apparently in some cases this entity knew the details of the person's whole life and, in facilitating the life review, intended to provoke the NDEr's reflection upon it.²⁷⁶ Moody also recognised that, "as a rule", those life reviews which were directed by the being of light represented a "more overwhelming experience" than those which were not.²⁷⁷ In this respect some of his experients characterised the life review as "an educational effort on the part of the being of light", for, as the review progressed the being of light seemed to "stress the importance of two things in life: learning to love other people and acquiring knowledge."²⁷⁸

Gallup's NDErs discovered that the "pictures and thoughts of their past lives", which made up their life reviews, had been "in a sense forced on them - or at least were run through their minds in a rushed sequence over which they had no control."²⁷⁹ Eighteen percent of Greyson's NDErs agreed with the statement that scenes from their past flashed before them, out of their control.²⁸⁰ Relevant to this issue Ring said that the individual viewing the images of the life review "ordinarily (but not always) experiences them with a sense of detachment."²⁸¹ He had also found, as shown

above, that the life review is sometimes "selectively edited", although he doesn't clarify this statement with regard to who does the editing.²⁸² For some of Ring's experiencers it was the NDE presence which led them to either "reflect" on their lives or to "reexperience" them as a life review, as they attempted to make up their minds whether or not to return to physical existence.²⁸³ It appeared that if the presence affected the NDEr during his/her life review at all it had to do mainly with the "love, comfort and acceptance" which it radiated or bestowed upon the NDEr. Ring actually reported that a sense of external judgement was not a common characteristic of the NDE, although his experiencers frequently spoke of making a "self-judgement" during their NDEs.²⁸⁴ Greyson and Stevenson's information about judgement during the NDE is not altogether clear, since they only state that 13% of their respondents reported a "feeling of being judged or held accountable for their lives."²⁸⁵ Hampe, like Ring, ascertained that in the context of their life reviews experiencers "continually" talked about judging themselves.²⁸⁶

Once again we pause to note a relatively uncommon observation made by Hampe. This time he associates the life review and encounters with deceased persons: "And when, in giving an account of the life panorama, the narrator (i.e. NDEr) talks about meeting people, usually his nearest and dearest, or when we are told he carried on conversations, the material we have never tells us what was actually said."²⁸⁷ Hampe is the only researcher who speaks of the life review in connection with deceased loved ones. Nevertheless, the reason for this

apparent typological variance is not difficult to understand, for it is again the case that Hampe fails to differentiate the "life panorama" from the other transcendent NDE phenomena. For him the "life panorama" encompasses all the phenomena beyond the "exit of the self", and therefore, encounters with deceased loved ones - which are reported by all the other researchers as being mutually exclusive of the life review - become associated with the life review.²⁸⁸

Considering further Hampe's data in relation to interactions within the life review, he reported that as experiencers experienced their life reviews they became aware of "things" from their lives which they could not have possibly known. During the life review, "life is being thought and experienced", in contrast to "ideas being lived as they are in a dream."²⁸⁹ In other words, "the dying do not passively register their life panorama like a film....they work with it, and with the self that is realized in it, and which...is so impotent to express itself when faced by this experience."²⁹⁰ "Immediate conflict", such as the experiencer's concern about the safety of loved ones, may be resolved during this experience.²⁹¹ Again, this statement is best understood in reference to the lack of differentiation among transcendent NDE phenomena in Hampe's presentation of data. Descriptively, Hampe gives his summary of this phenomenon by stating that the life review "can be linked with a working up, a refurbishing of past and present life"; a "curious mode of justification of the self."²⁹²

In some cases NDErs describe having had perceptions of future events, sometimes only of their own lives and

at other times of future events which are to take place on a more universal level. The chart below presents the results of Greyson's question, "Did scenes from the future come to you?":

	<u>NDErs</u> <u>(n = 183)</u>	<u>non-NDErs</u> <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	80%	98%
2 From personal future.	9%	0%
3 From the World's future.	11%	2%

As we can see, not only did 20% of his NDErs have perceptions of future events, but, once again, the chi-squared measurement for this data, $p. < 0.025$, distinguished the NDErs from the non-NDErs.²⁹³ Six percent of Gallup's NDErs reported "premonitions about some event or events that would happen in the future"²⁹⁴, while Ring claimed that some of his experiencers were "given information" about what they would experience in their "future physical existence" if they decided to return to it.²⁹⁵

During their life reviews some of Gallup's NDErs also "learned of events that were in the process of happening at some distance".²⁹⁶ As can be seen below, more than one third of Greyson's NDErs answered affirmatively the question, "Did you seem to be aware of things going on elsewhere, as if by ESP?"

	<u>NDErs</u> <u>(n = 183)</u>	<u>non-NDErs</u> <u>(n = 63)</u>
1 No.	66%	88%
2 Yes, but facts not yet corroborated.	20%	10%
3 Yes, and facts later corroborated.	14%	2%

The chi-squared measurement for this question was moderately significant; $p. < 0.025$.²⁹⁷

From what the major researchers have found, the following quantitative data have been made available in reference to the NDE life review. From Ring's group of core experiencers 12 (25%) had a life review²⁹⁸, which is nearly twice the frequency as that found in Green's study²⁹⁹ and almost eight times that of Sabom's study population.³⁰⁰ Of the 78 NDErs in Greyson and Stevenson's study 21 persons (27%) experienced a "review of past events, or 'panoramic memory'"³⁰¹, which is approximately the same percentage as Rings, as well as those determined by both Grey³⁰² and Gallup³⁰³. Hampe merely relates that "time after time, the dying see appearing before them...the life panorama".³⁰⁴ In response to the question "Did scenes from your past come back to you?", Greyson recorded the following results:³⁰⁵

	NDers (n = 183)	non-NDers (n = 63)
1 No.	75%	97%
2 Remembered many past events.	8%	3% ³⁰⁶
3 Past flashed before me, out of my control.	17%	0%

Summary

Table XXIII summarises the available quantitative data for NDers' experiences of life reviews.

Table XXIII:
The NDE Life Review

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDers</u>
Gallup	31% (n=79)
Greyson/Stevenson	27% (n=78)
Grey	26% (n=38)
Greyson	25% (n=183)
Ring	25% (n=48)
Green	12% (n=50)
Sabom	3% (n=61)
Weighted mean.....	<u>22%</u>

In the above description of the life review, many important NDE phenomena were considered. The stage at which the life review takes place is typically reported to correlate with that at which the NDE (being of) light or presence are encountered. Therefore, since the life review almost always functions as an aid in the decision whether to return to physical life or not, it is understood best as a phenomenon which takes place at the

end of the NDE. Those experiencers whose NDEs were triggered by sudden physical trauma were much more likely to report having had a life review than those whose NDEs were not triggered by sudden and unexpected physical trauma.³⁰⁷ In terms of the reality of the life review experiencers report that there was an incredible vividness to the "images". Some experiencers even claimed to interact with their past, in a sense living events over again.

The range of the life review varies from person to person. Some experiencers report that it encompassed their entire lives, while others only experienced particular events from the past, which were usually described as being the most significant moments from their personal histories. The speed at which the life review images were "viewed" was characterised as being extraordinarily rapid - most of the researchers explained that this phenomenon took place in an instant of earthly time. Ring's use of the term "hologram" would seem to be descriptively quite helpful here. It is most likely for this reason that there appears to be some degree of disagreement concerning the sequence of the life review: some experiencers report that their life reviews progressed from the present backwards; others, from childhood to the present; and the rest, that there was no definite sequence at all.

The emotional content of the life review was often one of peace and comfort, usually attributed by the experiencer to the simultaneous communication/communion with the being of light or loving presence. Because the events viewed in the life review were many times understood anew in the presence of a loving entity, this

NDE type has been depicted as educational and particularly revealing. Consistently, if present, one of the otherworldly entities was instrumental in initiating and directing the life review, prompting the experient to make a *self-judgement* of his/her own life. This may be the reason why some NDErs felt that they had no control over the images/events which made up their life reviews. Also presented were the findings relating to the acquisition of knowledge during the life review (or a similar visionary, NDE experience) pertaining to personal and global events which are supposed to take place in the future, as well as events taking place somewhere else at the same time as the NDE.

6.4 The Transcendent Otherworldly Setting

As we saw above, for Ring's experients the perception of the NDE light, in the context of the transition into the transcendent realm, signified a "termination of the experience of dying and the *beginning of new life*."³⁰⁸ As we will see here, this makes sense for a variety of reasons, one of which is that this is the "place" where experients are typically reunited with deceased loved ones.³⁰⁹ This otherworldly realm was perceived to be not only the place which is illuminated by the NDE light, but the site where the light also has its "origin".³¹⁰ In terms of whether this "place" seems to be real, or simply a dream-like world, Ring learned that his experients had the profound sense of actually being in "another world...of preternatural beauty", where among other things "unforgettable colors", "beautiful flowers" and "lovely music" could be

enjoyed. Some of Ring's NDErs found themselves in meadow-like environments, while others spoke of seeing "unusual physical-like structures" which were not like anything they had ever seen on earth.³¹¹ Understandably experiencers often expressed their disappointment associated with this place as they are usually permitted to have only a "glimpse", not an extended visit, of this realm.³¹² Ten percent of Ring's entire sample reported entering this transcendental realm.³¹³

It was stated above that, like Ring's, Grey's experiencers encountered the NDE light as "a messenger of joy" which guided them out of the darkness and into "new life". In one sense, this "new life" was a term Grey used to describe the perceived effects that this otherworldly realm had had on her NDErs. It is the special, profoundly affecting NDE light that provides the illumination in this "world within", a realm of "surpassing beauty"³¹⁴. Not only were the colours³¹⁵ here said to be "out of this world" but many of the experiencers gave descriptions which did not "seem to correspond exactly to anything in this world."³¹⁶ Twenty-one percent of her 38 experiencers said that while in this realm they experienced a "feeling of oneness", and 26% that they communicated telepathically.³¹⁷ Some entered entire landscapes³¹⁸ and/or heard "preternatural harmonies"³¹⁹, regarded as the 'music of the spheres'.³²⁰ Here "intense musical impressions" of favourite pieces of music were felt by a number of Hampe's NDErs.³²¹ "Unusual auditory phenomena" such as "music" and "noises" were heard by 57% of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs as well.³²²

Gallup too, like Ring and Grey, discovered that an incredible transition takes place within the NDE, one in which at first the experient is aware of being in the natural, physical realm and then of moving on to where his/her awareness is in the "afterlife".³²³ Sometimes those who entered this otherworld experienced an "incredible enhancement of their spiritual, intellectual or physical powers" and/or received the impression that in this "afterlife" there was "great potential...for personal growth and transformation". For example some NDErs described having "a greater feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood, and of acceptance in general by others", where their feelings of being inadequate and lack of "self-confidence" were simply eradicated.³²⁴ Another important aspect of this phenomenon has to do with the deceased relatives' "heavenly bodies", which, like their own NDE "bodies", can "move about at will".³²⁵ This relationship between the "extradimensional mind" and the "extradimensional body" highlights the "enhanced mental powers" which experiencers frequently possess in this realm.³²⁶ In total 31% of Gallup's NDErs had a "special sensation or feeling, such as being in another world".³²⁷ He provides numerous examples of transcendent environments which his NDErs described, including such things as "sunny landscapes, flowers, and streams".³²⁸ When he asked those who had reported a verge-of-death encounter³²⁹ the direct question, "Do you feel that you actually had a glimpse of an afterlife or heaven, or not?", he received the following broad ranging responses: 18% said "yes definitely", 11% replied "yes, maybe", 28% gave a "definite no", 17% replied that they "couldn't say", and 26% "gave no response".³³⁰

Similar reports of this otherworldly dimension came from Sabom's study. Specifically, 28 (46%) of his NDErs gave "greatly varied descriptions" of "a region of scenic beauty": 11 (18%) perceived "scenes of pastoral, earthly beauty", 8 (13%) "'nonterrestrial' scenes of clouds, skies, stars or a mist", and 9 (15%) respondents gave "ethereal, heavenly descriptions...(which) commonly included a gate perceived to be the entrance to heaven."³³¹ According to all 28 experients, this place had not been previously visited and was not even recognized. As was pointed out above, there was no doubt in these respondents' minds that their experiences were "real", as if they had really travelled to another "physical location".³³² All in all 54% (33) of his 61 non-surgical NDErs reported having entered such a "transcendent environment".³³³

It was in Lindley's study that this NDE type was labelled the "inner setting" for the first time. Thirty-four percent of the NDE testimonies making up this study containing some kind of anecdote about such an experience. In an attempt to describe this phenomenon in a way representative of the NDErs' accounts the type was correlated with a number of different well known concepts:

it is apparent that this stage is... the 'Realm of the Ancestors' in Hindu mythology, the 'Happy Hunting Ground' (so called by the white culture) of the Plains Indians, and 'Paradise' in Judeo-Christian and Islamic cultures. This is where the consciousness finds itself before resuscitation takes place.³³⁴

As was shown above, Green found that of the 9 experients which fell into the category "Entering the Light" none

both "entered" the NDE light and encountered such a transcendent, "beautiful pastoral setting".³³⁵ Those experiencers who did enter this setting portrayed it as a "total sensory experience".³³⁶

Entering some "unearthly realm of experience" was reported by 72% of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs³³⁷, which represents almost the exact same percentage of affirmative answers Greyson's NDErs gave in his study ten years later. Below we see the precise results obtained when his subjects replied to the question "Did you seem to enter some other, unearthly world?":

	NDErs (n = 183)	non-NDErs (n = 63)
1 No.	24%	88%
2 Unfamiliar, strange place.	20%	10%
3 Clearly mystical or unearthly realm.	56%	2%

As was the case for almost all of Greyson's questions, the chi-squared measurement for this question was also highly significant; $p. < .005$.³³⁸

Summary

Table XXIV summarises the quantitative data pertaining to the transcendent, otherworldly setting in the NDE.

Table XXIV:
The Transcendent, Otherworldly setting

<u>Study</u>	<u>Frequency for NDErs</u>
Greyson/Stevenson	72% (n=78)
Greyson	56% (n=183)
Sabom	54% (n=61)
Lindley	34% (n=55)
Gallup	31% (n=79)
Grey	30% (n=38)
Ring	21% (n=48)
Green	18% (n=50)
Weighted mean.....	<u>45%</u>

Referring back to the section on the researchers' methodologies and NDE categorisations, it should be noted that the studies conducted by Moody, Hampe, Ring, Lindley, and Green all lacked a category/element reserved solely for the NDE transcendent, otherworldly setting. This is pointed out in order to put the data above into proper perspective. The reason why the researchers do not possess a great deal of information concerning this extraordinary realm could very well have to do with the reality that it is typically experienced at the "end" of "deep" or full-blown NDEs, which are reported relatively infrequently. Another factor must certainly be the fact that when this realm is entered only a brief visit is commonly granted.

However, as we have seen, it is possible to make a number of observations about the character of the NDE transcendent, otherworldly setting. Almost without exception this is a place of incredible beauty; some experiencers reported seeing magnificent earth-like landscapes and sometimes heard sublime music, some found themselves in a realm where the environment, and all

that it included, was unearthly. This place was seldom, if ever, recognized as one visited before. Some experiencers were led or guided to this place by a spiritual being, commonly the being of light, and most interpreted it in terms of their own concepts of a positive afterlife or "paradise". Many times this is where deceased loved ones were encountered, undoubtedly contributing to experiencers' feelings of complete acceptance and unity with the surroundings and other entities present. Given these characteristics it is not surprising that many NDErs believed that this was the place where they would begin a whole new life.

Transcendent Realm Experience Summary

In this section we have seen that it is relatively common for NDErs to enter some kind of transcendent realm and/or have a transcendent experience during their NDEs. This sometimes follows the autoscopic NDE phenomena and/or the darkness/void experience, while in other cases the NDE is comprised of these transcendent phenomena only.

Union with the special NDE light is a transforming, enlightening, and awesomely positive affective experience. NDErs tend to experience the light as a living, personal being, with most recounting their experiences with it as a kind of communion. A non-visualized presence, most often understood to be an authoritative spiritual guide, may also be sensed or intuited during the NDE. This presence is most often identified with a particular religious/spiritual figure (e.g. God) who initiates the experiencer's reflections

concerning whether or not *he/she will decide* to return to physical existence. Reported more frequently and with greater detail, visualized spiritual beings also act as guides, although these invariably tell NDErs that they *must* return. Fairly often joyful reunions take place at this time when these visualized entities are deceased loved ones.

Like the NDE "presence" the NDE (being of) light may initiate and guide the experient through a visually vivid review of part or all of his/her life. This serves as an educational tool, as experients themselves assess their lives, and in so doing, come to a decision about returning. The final transcendent experience reported is a brief visit to a positive afterlife setting. Earth-like or non-earth-like "things" make up this unrecognized realm of profound beauty, where feelings of oneness with the entire setting (including any spiritual entities present) lead most experients to the conviction that this is where their "life" begins, not ends.

7.0 Returning

At some point in their NDEs many experients find themselves involved in a situation which is directly correlated with their return to physical existence. The general characteristics associated with these phenomena are presented here in four sub-sections: 1) the border experience, 2) the return with no transcendent, transitional event, 3) specific reason(s) for returning, and 4) the choice involved in the decision to return.

7.1 Border Experience

Of Ring's core experiencers 28 (57%) reported at least one of the following phenomena directly associated with their return³³⁹: encountering a presence, being reunited with deceased loved ones, having a life review, and/or reaching a border or point of no return. Ring noted that the "last event" which the NDEr usually remembers from his/her experience is the decision to return³⁴⁰, which is more often than not "made in an atmosphere that has a very definite otherworldly ambience."³⁴¹ However, this does not mean that it only takes place in the transcendent setting, many actually experienced it during one of the "intermediate" stages, e.g., the "body separation", "entering the darkness", or "seeing the light".³⁴² When Ring asked his 49 core experiencers directly "Did you ever feel you were approaching some kind of boundary or threshold - a point of no return?" he obtained the following results³⁴³: 27% said yes; 43% no; and 12% were "not sure".³⁴⁴ None of these core experiencers - not even the 27% who responded affirmatively - stated or even "implied" that this experience involved a "visual image", rather, it was described in terms of a "cognitive" phenomenon.³⁴⁵

Grey too stated explicitly that there were a number of "phenomenological features" which had "cut across the phases of the NDE" bringing them to a close.³⁴⁶ These included "some kind of barrier"³⁴⁷, "the 'Presence'", "meeting with deceased 'spirits'", the "life review" and an explicit "decision to return".³⁴⁸ All, in some way or another, left the experient with the impression that

he/she had reached the "borderland" of "another realm of existence".³⁴⁹

Moody however was the first, in modern NDE studies, to report that "in a few instances" NDErs perceived a "border or a limit of some kind" during the transcendent stage of their experiences, e.g., "a body of water, a grey mist, a door, a fence across a field, or simply a line."³⁵⁰ In 4 of the 5 cases which definitely included a border, Moody believed that it was perfectly clear that passage beyond the border would have meant not returning to physical life. For example, deceased relatives were located on the other side of the border in 4 of the 5 cases. One particularly fascinating, and unique, account described how an experient actually did cross the "line" - as encouraged by the NDE "light" - and immediately experienced "peace, tranquillity, a vanishing of all worries". Of course the experient did return to physical life though.³⁵¹

According to Sabom's "transcendent" and "combined" NDErs, within the "transcendental environment" a "border" or "limit" was sometimes perceived as the "point of no return". This took the form of a "thing" in the transcendental pastoral setting, e.g., a "stream of water", a "barbed wire fence", and a "mountaintop".³⁵² In other accounts experiencers believed that if they were to grasp the "outstretched hands of a visualized spirit" they would never return to their physical bodies.³⁵³ The return for autoscopic NDErs was "often" perceived to be "instantaneous...coinciding with a particular resuscitative measure, observed immediately prior to the end of the experience."³⁵⁴

Greyson and Stevenson had also found that 57% of their NDErs encountered a border or "point of no return".³⁵⁵ As we can see below, a rather large proportion of Greyson's NDErs also gave a positive response to the question, "Did you come to a border or point of no return?":³⁵⁶

	NDErs (n = 183)	non-NDErs (n = 63)
1 No.	31%	90%
2 Conscious decision to "return" to life.	30%	8%
3 Barrier I was not permitted to cross; or "sent back" to life involun- tarily.	39%	2%

Although the "border experience" was not a phenomenon Green discussed, of the 8 NDErs' testimonies presented in his study - in the context of encounters with other entities - 2 contained phenomenon of this type, i.e., a "beautiful white gate" and a "tree" (which the experient tried, but failed, to climb).³⁵⁷

7.2 The Return with no Transcendent, Transitional Event

Three (6%) of Ring's respondents - that is 11% of the 28 experients that reported some specific phenomena in relation to returning - related that the decision to return was not arrived at via any of the phenomena given above, i.e. an encounter with a presence, other

being(s), a border experience, or a life review.³⁵⁸ Of Grey's 32 NDErs who reported a "boundary" experience seventeen (53%) simply described it as a "decision to return".³⁵⁹ Some of Sabom's NDErs claimed that a "strong, unidentified force" had "drawn them back into their physical body"³⁶⁰, while others, especially from the transcendent and combined group of NDErs, returned quite unexpectedly without any corresponding phenomena.³⁶¹

7.3 Specific Reasons for Returning

Generally, most of Moody's NDErs did not know why the return took place. Some though felt that they were "allowed to live by 'God', or by the being of light" either because of their own requests, "usually because the request was made unselfishly", or because they had to fulfil some "mission" for one of these beings.³⁶² For example, "several" women told Moody that, although, "for themselves" they did not want to return, they felt that it was their duty to go back to raise their children. Whereas in other cases the experient "felt happy to be able to return", for they had "left some important task undone."³⁶³ Moody noted as well that "in a few instances" the "love or prayers of others" had "pulled them (i.e., the experients) back from death regardless of their own wishes."³⁶⁴ Similarly, among Ring's respondents who had a clear memory of the return phenomena, there were two "nonindependent" reasons typically give for returning to physical existence:

- 1) The 'pull' of loved ones - usually children or spouses - who are felt to have need of the respondent or 2) a sense that one's life and

purposes are not yet accomplished - a feeling of 'unfinished business'.³⁶⁵

The usual reasons Gallup's experiencers cited for their returns were "to care for a little child or be a companion to a spouse."³⁶⁶

Sabom too discovered that the topic of communication with the presence or a "visualized spiritual being" was an "important reason" for the experiencer's return. In fact, in the majority of transcendent and combined cases the "'return' was either influenced or directed by another spiritual being."³⁶⁷

7.4 The Choice Involved in the Decision to Return

Almost all of Ring's experiencers recalled either deciding for themselves to return or being "'sent back' (in a few instances, apparently, against their own preferences)". To be precise, sixteen (33%) reported choosing, bargaining or willing themselves to return, 5 (10%) claimed that they were sent back, and 7 (14%) recounted that - even though they experienced one of the above decisional phenomena - "how the decision was made" was not "clear" to them.³⁶⁸ Ring reached the conclusion that the experiencer usually makes this apparently pivotal decision with "heightened mental clarity"; a "(subjective) sense of logic, detachment, and rationality" which the experiencer consciously perceives as being extraordinary.³⁶⁹ Emotionally speaking, as mentioned above, Ring found that this decision was normally made within the context of "awe, wonder, comfort, and peace".³⁷⁰

Although a few asserted that they had made a "voluntary" decision to return most of Lindley's NDErs stated that the decision had not been their own.³⁷¹ Some of these recalled consulting spiritual "guides", while, in contrast, 5 (9%) had been the subject of a transcendent "tribunal" type scenario.³⁷² Many of Gallup's NDErs experienced a real "sense of control" regarding their "power to make a decision about returning or not to the physical body."³⁷³ It would seem that such power was limited in a good many cases given Gallup's finding that there was a definite "hierarchy of authority and obedience" in the "afterlife" realm.³⁷⁴ Although Green does not offer any information concerning these encounters with non-earthly entities and the "return", from the 8 NDE testimonies that are given in his report - which do have to do with the return - five show that the experient was sent back by a known, unseen spirit, a being of light, a deceased grandmother, a presence, and Jesus Christ.³⁷⁵

For quite a number of NDErs being sent back to earthly existence is not a highlight of the experience. Even though it was not common for Ring's experients to resent being sent back, for those who had progressed as far as the transcendent realm such disappointment was "particularly evident".³⁷⁶ Grey made the same observation: some of the 33% who reached the stage of a "world within...of surpassing beauty"³⁷⁷ expressed "resentment" for "reluctantly being brought back to life."³⁷⁸ Many of Lindley's NDErs as well felt angry for "having to return to a body racked with pain."³⁷⁹ At this point it is hardly surprising that Moody was the first to publish essentially the same findings. He had

found a consistently expressed attitude of displeasure among those who had been sent back after having gone so far as to "encounter the being of light".³⁸⁰

7.5 Re-entering the Physical Body

The dying person finds the doctors' attempts to bring him back to life painful. He often feels that he is being forced through a bottleneck. He wants to resist it, he is sad.³⁸¹

According to Hampe's analysis of the accounts making up his study these are the physical and emotional sensations which NDErs typically experience when it comes time for them to re-enter their physical bodies. The actual process, or event, of going back into the physical body was not recalled by most of Ring's NDErs, although the few who did remember also described it in negative terms, e.g., some had a "falling feeling" and experienced a "jolt" upon re-entering their bodies, while others felt as though they were "being pulled out of a tremendous vacuum, and being torn to pieces".³⁸² This kind of physical trauma was also recalled by a few of Gallup's NDErs, who were "jerked back...into the here and now"³⁸³. Many of Lindley's NDErs fought against their return, emphasising that the process of "getting back" into the body was quite unpleasant.³⁸⁴ In contrast, of the 58 (75%) persons in Greyson and Stevenson's study who reported an OBE 79% (46/58) described returning as "easy". This apparent contradiction may be accounted for, at least partially, by the fact that most of these NDErs also re-entered their bodies in an "instantaneous" fashion.³⁸⁵ The

majority of Moody's experients simply "'went to sleep' or lapsed into unconsciousness" at the end of their NDEs, although some did report the sensation of "being drawn speedily back towards their physical bodies, often with a jerk" at the close of their experiences.³⁸⁶ In the handful of detailed re-entry accounts which Moody possessed experients even remembered that they had re-entered their bodies "through the head".³⁸⁷

Summary

Of course all NDErs return to tell us about their amazing experiences, although a large proportion of them do not recall any particular phenomena associated with their return to their physical bodies. Of the ones that do it seems that the number who remember making the decision to return themselves is equivalent to those who were sent back. For those who entered a transcendent, otherworldly realm returning was usually determined by 1) whether or not the experient could overcome a boundary or point of no return, or 2) the decision of another NDE entity. In most cases where the experient encountered the presence, the being of light, and/or had a life review it appeared that the NDEr was much more likely to make his/her own decision, albeit the influence each of these three types has on the individual is invariably profound. The most common reasons for returning had to do with 1) continuing relationships with loved ones, and/or 2) fulfilling one's (many times newly realized) purpose in life. For autoscopic NDErs, if remembered, returning was usually correlated with the viewed resuscitation of their

physical bodies. The actual re-entry into the body was rarely remembered, as was the exit from it at the beginning of the NDE. When experiencers did recall this final NDE phenomenon it was described by most as being an extremely painful process which was consciously resisted. Not a few NDEers resented having to leave the paradise-like realm and/or return to a physical body full of pain, yet most NDEers did not since they came to realise the purposefulness of their earthly existence.

8.0 Typological Summary

In offering a descriptive summary of the NDE types in qualitative terms it should be noted first that most experiencers describe their NDEs as being 1) ineffable, 2) real, 3) timeless, and 4) part of the process of dying or the event which follows their actual deaths. Putting aside for now those rare cases of negative NDEs, as a whole each of the major NDE types contribute in some way to what is commonly described as the most peaceful, inspiring, liberating, and transforming experience of one's life.

This peak experience always takes place "outside" of the physical body, sometimes as an Autoscopic NDE (where the "self" perceives the physical surrounding and events), a Transcendent NDE (where the self encounters transcendent phenomena exclusively), or a combination of both; a Combined NDE. Experiencers - i.e., their mind, consciousness, or essential self - retain their identity throughout the NDE, even when they believe that they have taken on a new form. In this out of body state it

is common for both the NDEr's sensual and cognitive awareness to be tremendously enhanced.

Either after the autoscopic portion of the NDE or at the very beginning of the NDE some experiencers find themselves in a void or absolutely dark (sometime enclosed) space. Invariably a transitional NDE phenomenon, experiencers speak of moving through this area towards a special light, which may subsequently facilitate an encounter with spiritual beings, deceased loved ones, a life review, and/or entry into a transcendent, otherworldly setting. However, these NDE types are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Most experiencers believe that the NDE light itself is alive and personal; identifying it with religious/spiritual figures is the norm. As golden, brilliant, beautiful, magnetic, loving, and wise interaction with this light is like an absolutely revitalising communion, which typically involves communication about the experiencer's life and whether or not he/she will decide to return to his/her physical body.

Most of the time the NDE life review is initiated and guided by the being of light or a non-visualized presence; an unseen, authoritative spiritual guide. Experiencers' own reflections/judgements during their life reviews serve as an aid in their decision to return. This decision is usually not given to experiencers themselves in their meetings with other spiritual beings, besides for the being of light and the presence. These other NDE entities, sometimes including deceased loved ones and relatives, inform NDErs that it is not their time to die and that they must go back to their

physical bodies. Encounters like this usually take place in a transcendent setting. Earth-like or non-earth-like, this positive "afterlife" environment is said to be astoundingly beautiful and peaceful. Only a "glimpse" is had in this ultimate NDE "place", for this is the realm, according to most who visit it, where new life beyond death begins. Relatively often this setting includes a boundary or point of no return.

Among the majority of NDErs who recall phenomena associated with their return, approximately half made their own decision and half were sent back. The two most common reasons for the return were 1) to be with loved ones, and 2) to fulfil one's purpose in life. Although the actual process of re-entering the body is seldom recalled (as is the case in separating from the body in the beginning), when it is re-entry is extremely painful and, therefore, resisted.

At the heart of a final quantitative summary of the NDE typology lies the inseparable issues of the frequency of reported NDE types and the order in which they tend to unfold. In essence because the NDE is a "timeless" phenomenon we are forced to assume that the order in which the types are arranged is directly correlated with their frequency of occurrence. As was seen in the previous chapter Ring, Lindley, Green and Grey's data all roughly supported Ring's original "five stage" theory.³⁸⁸ However, the weighted mean figures which represent our statistical summary of the NDE typology, presented below in Table XXV, show that the order of Ring's stages does not correspond completely with that based purely on the frequency of weighted means generated by the statistical input of ten studies

collectively. Thus, we are able to assert that NDEs do not necessarily progress according to Ring's five stages. It is doubted that this is a vital typological problem, for, in addition, none of the other four studies making up the core group confirmed the precise frequencies and order which Ring had originally formulated anyway. The extent to which the quantitative findings of all these studies are *similar* though is itself certainly significant.

Table XXV:
Frequency and Ordering of the NDE Types

NDE Phenomena	Weighted Means from Statistics Presented Above ³⁸⁹	Ring's Five Stage Theory Ranking
1) Peace/painlessness	65%	1
2) Out-of-body-experience	61%	2
3) Perception of non-visualised and/or visualised non-physical Beings	49%	
4) Otherworldly setting	45%	5
5) NDE light	40%	4
6) Darkness/void	25%	3
7) Life review	22%	

ENDNOTES

¹ See Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975) *Life after life*. Mockingbird Books, New York, 25; Hampe, J. C. (1979) *To die is gain; the experience of one's own death*. translated by Longman and Todd, London (first published as *Sterben ist doch ganz anders*, Breitwissenstrasse, Kreuz Verlag, Stuttgart, 1975), 40; Ring, K. (1980) *Life at death a scientific investigation of the near-death experience*. Coward, McCann and Georghagan, New York, 84-85; Sabom, M. (1982) *Recollections of death: a medical investigation*. Corgi Books, Transworld Publishers LTD, London, 15; and Gallup, G.Jr., with Proctor, W. (1983) *Adventures in immortality: a look beyond the threshold of death*. Souvenir, London. 50.

² See Ring, 82, 91, 94; Gallup, 38-41; Sabom, 32-33; Grey, M. (1985) *Return from death*. Arkana (Routledge and Kegan Paul), London, 34; and Green, T. J., and Friedman, P. (1983) Near-death experiences in a southern california population. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3, 91. This "subjective sense of reality" during the NDE will be dealt with in much greater detail below in terms of cognitive, affective, sensual, and paranormal NDE phenomena.

³ Hampe, 35; Ring, 95-96; Sabom, 32; Gallup, 31, 34; and Greyson, B. (1990) Near-death encounters with and without near-death experiences: comparative NDE scale profiles. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 8 (3), 156; and Greyson, B., and Stevenson, I. (1980) The phenomenology of near-death experiences. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 137 (10), 1193-1195.

⁴ See Moody, 26, 36; Ring, 87-88; Greyson/Stevenson, 1195; Sabom, 33-34; and Grey 41. External cues (e.g., "seeing" one's lifeless body, "hearing" one's self pronounced dead, etc.) also play a role in this perception. Greyson and Stevenson found that the longer the NDE the less likely the subject was to believe that he or she was dying. (Greyson/Stevenson, 1195).

⁵ Data concerning negative NDEs will be considered later. At this point it is important to note simply that negative NDEs are very rarely reported, and though only a few researchers have collected such cases these suggest that the frequency of occurrence for these may well be

the same as for the positive NDE. For our typological purposes, a study has yet to appear which would even come close to meeting the criteria given in the previous chapter.

⁶ NDE testimony in Moody, 29.

⁷ Ring, 95.

⁸ Sixty percent of Ring's study population said that they experienced this peaceful, first stage of the NDE. (Ring, 140).

⁹ Throughout this chapter and in the ones to follow "non-experiencer" and "non-NDEr" refers to those persons who have had a close brush with physical death yet have no, or very little, recollection of any "experience" during the related period of "unconsciousness". However, in the previous chapter the criteria employed by each study to determine who was and who was not a "NDEr" were presented, and should be consulted if a more precise understanding is desired for any specific observation concerning "non-NDErs" for particular studies.

¹⁰ Of his 49 experiencers all but one person (thus 98%), had some positive emotion, while 35 (66%) of the non-experiencers in the study reported no emotions. (Ring, 44).

¹¹ Ring, 49.

¹² Ibid, 44.

¹³ Grey, 26.

¹⁴ Ibid, 33.

¹⁵ Sabom, 35.

¹⁶ Ibid, 278, Table IX.

¹⁷ Green, 80.

¹⁸ Ibid, 77-96.

¹⁹ Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.

²⁰ Greyson, 156-157. Putting it simply, the Chi-squared measurement indicates the chances that a given relationship between two data are not linked or similar.

Thus, this 0.005 measurement means that there is only a .5% chance that a person would be making a false assumption if he or she were to assume that the NDErs' and non-NDErs' responses to the given questions would not be similar. In other words, there is a 99.5% chance that the assumption is indeed true. Anything lower than a chi-squared measurement of $p. < 0.05$ is considered significant, which makes $p. < 0.005$ highly significant. Concerning this relatively high level of NDE-type phenomena among these self-defined "Non-NDErs", and thus labeled here as such, see section 3.10 in chapter two dealing with Greyson's methodology.

²¹ Words commonly used by this study's experients included "peace", happiness", "painlessness", and "tranquillity". (Lindley, J. H., Bryan, S., and Conley, B. (1981) Near-death experiences in a pacific northwest american population: the evergreen study. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 1, 107-108. (Italic mine).

²² Gallup, 43.

²³ Gallup, 108.

²⁴ Gallup, 43-44.

²⁵ Gallup, 33.

²⁶ Gallup, 108.

²⁷ Moody, 37 -38.

²⁸ This phenomenon was recounted by 26% of his NDErs. (Gallup, 31, and 34).

²⁹ Hampe, 38.

³⁰ Moody, 38-41.

³¹ Grey, 34.

³² Ibid, 31.

³³ Ring, 88.

³⁴ Ring, 49.

³⁵ Ibid, 53.

³⁶ Gallup, 53.

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- ³⁷ Ring, 56
- ³⁸ Grey, 44.
- ³⁹ Hampe, 68.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 70.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 54.
- ⁴² Ring, 67.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 196.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 81. Although this is true for a majority of the NDErs having a life review, it will be seen below that in some cases experients are not happy to return to the pain of their physical bodies and earthly lives.
- ⁴⁵ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.
- ⁴⁶ Ring, 45.
- ⁴⁷ Lindley, 107-108.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 109.
- ⁴⁹ Sabom, 38-39.
- ⁵⁰ Gallup, 33.
- ⁵¹ Grey, 36.
- ⁵² Ibid, 42.
- ⁵³ Ibid, 46.
- ⁵⁴ Hampe, 38.
- ⁵⁵ Ring, 52. (*Italic mine*).
- ⁵⁶ Sabom, 39.
- ⁵⁷ This is Grey's descriptive term for the otherworldly or transcendental realm that NDErs tend to describe in relation to some sort of heaven or paradise.
- ⁵⁸ Grey, 48.
- ⁵⁹ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.

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- ⁶⁰ Green, 81.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 82.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.
- ⁶⁴ Gallup, 105.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid, 104.
- ⁶⁶ Moody, 52-53.
- ⁶⁷ Sabom, 39.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, 39-40.
- ⁶⁹ Hampe, 39 (*Italic mine*). This observation that the NDEr takes on another body that is "full of light" is unique to Hampe; I have not found a similar claim in any of the NDE literature I have encounter in my own research.
- ⁷⁰ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.
- ⁷¹ Ring, 96. The remaining 20% where not asked this question or gave an "indeterminant" answer.
- ⁷² Ring, 97.
- ⁷³ Grey, 48.
- ⁷⁴ Moody, 43-46.
- ⁷⁵ Sabom, 46.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, 46-47. Exceptionally, three of the thirty-two did not relate being at "ceiling height" but were still able to view their unconscious bodies from above. The difference though was that the individuals claimed to be 1) 60 feet above his body, 2) 150 feet above, and 3) so far above the body that the NDEr perceived himself to be at a height at which an airplane may fly. (Ibid, 44).
- ⁷⁷ Hampe, 36.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid, 36-37.
- ⁷⁹ Ring, 45.

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- ⁸⁰ Green, 80-85.
- ⁸¹ Grey, 34. Specifically, twelve (34%) of her NDErs were "suspended above" their physical bodies. (Grey, 31).
- ⁸² Grey, 34.
- ⁸³ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194. Sixty-six percent of Greyson and Stevenson's NDErs (88% of all those recalling an OBE) reported this. Without giving any information about how such movement during the OBE is accomplished, Greyson and Stevenson simply relate that 95% of their NDErs who reported an OBE stated that they were able to move around the physical environment "most commonly within a limited area a few yards from the body." (Greyson and Stevenson, 1195).
- ⁸⁴ Moody, 34.
- ⁸⁵ Grey, 34 (*Italic mine*).
- ⁸⁶ Ibid, 31.
- ⁸⁷ Gallup, 38.
- ⁸⁸ See Green, 84.
- ⁸⁹ Greyson, 157. Also see endnote 20 concerning the presence of NDE phenomenon for non-NDErs.
- ⁹⁰ Moody, 51.
- ⁹¹ Ring, 45.
- ⁹² Grey, 34. Twenty-one percent of her NDErs reported the experience of a highly illuminated environment.
- ⁹³ Grey, 37-38.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid, 34.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid, 31.
- ⁹⁶ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194-1195.
- ⁹⁷ Sabom, 47-52.
- ⁹⁸ Five (15.6%) unsuccessfully attempted to communicate with those in the vicinity. (Sabom, 52-56).

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- ⁹⁹ Gallup, 38.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 31.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid, 41.
- ¹⁰² Ibid, 38.
- ¹⁰³ Green, 80-81.
- ¹⁰⁴ Moody, 50.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ring, 45.
- ¹⁰⁶ Sabom, 40.
- ¹⁰⁷ Gallup, 27.
- ¹⁰⁸ Lindley, 109.
- ¹⁰⁹ Greyson, 156. See endnote 20.
- ¹¹⁰ See Green, 84.
- ¹¹¹ Sabom, 54.
- ¹¹² Ibid, 62.
- ¹¹³ Ibid, 276-277, Table VIII.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid, 67 (*Italic mine*).
- ¹¹⁵ Hampe, 36-37.
- ¹¹⁶ Gallup, 27.
- ¹¹⁷ Thirty-five percent of Gallup's verge-of-death experiencers reported this phenomena. (Gallup, 27).
- ¹¹⁸ Gallup, 27.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid, 28-29
- ¹²⁰ Lindley, 109.
- ¹²¹ Ring, 53.
- ¹²² Ibid.
- ¹²³ Ring, 53-56.

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- ¹²⁴ Moody, 30-31.
- ¹²⁵ Gallup, 52.
- ¹²⁶ Lindley, 110.
- ¹²⁷ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.
- ¹²⁸ Hampe, 67. Unlike most of the major NDE researchers Hampe does not make a clear differentiation between an experience of a dark, dimensionless and/or enclosed space and the transcendental/otherworldly environment typical of NDEs. In this case it does seem clear, though, that he is speaking of an experience that precedes a full blown encounter in a transcendental/otherworldly dimension.
- ¹²⁹ Grey, 31.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid, 41.
- ¹³¹ Green, 85.
- ¹³² Ibid.
- ¹³³ Sabom, 278, Table IX.
- ¹³⁴ Ibid, 65.
- ¹³⁵ Ring, 53.
- ¹³⁶ Moody, 30.
- ¹³⁷ Ring, 56.
- ¹³⁸ Lindley, 110.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁰ Grey, 41.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid, 42.
- ¹⁴² Ibid, 31.
- ¹⁴³ Green, 85.
- ¹⁴⁴ Hampe, 67.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ring, 56.

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- ¹⁴⁶ Moody, 58.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ring, 57.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 56.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 56-57.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 56.
- ¹⁵¹ Grey, 44.
- ¹⁵² Ibid, 31.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid, 48.
- ¹⁵⁴ Sabom, 65.
- ¹⁵⁵ Green, 86.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 92-93.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ring, 56.
- ¹⁵⁸ Moody, 58.
- ¹⁵⁹ Lindley, 111.
- ¹⁶⁰ Sabom, 65.
- ¹⁶¹ Grey, 44.
- ¹⁶² Ibid, 31.
- ¹⁶³ Green, 86.
- ¹⁶⁴ Gallup, 45.
- ¹⁶⁵ Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ¹⁶⁶ Greyson, 157. The chi-squared measurement was $p. < .005$.
- ¹⁶⁷ See endnote 20.
- ¹⁶⁸ Ring, 56.
- ¹⁶⁹ Grey, 31.
- ¹⁷⁰ Hampe, 39.

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- ¹⁷¹ Ibid, 63 (*Italic mine*)
- ¹⁷² Green, 86-87.
- ¹⁷³ Moody, 58-59 (*Italic mine*).
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 59.
- ¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Moody reports that one Christian woman didn't report the light to be Jesus Christ, she simply called it a "being of light". (Ibid, 59).
- ¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 59-60.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 61-62.
- ¹⁷⁹ Grey, 44-45.
- ¹⁸⁰ Gallup, 5.
- ¹⁸¹ Ring was only told by three respondents of a vision of a religious figure, i.e., 6% of core experiencers. (Ring, 287).
- ¹⁸² Ibid, 59.
- ¹⁸³ Ibid, 57. Two of Ring's NDErs stated that they had a "vision of Jesus...in which he was surrounded by this light." (Ibid).
- ¹⁸⁴ Sabom, 66.
- ¹⁸⁵ Lindley, 111.
- ¹⁸⁶ Gallup, 31 and 45.
- ¹⁸⁷ Grey, 48.
- ¹⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁸⁹ Ring, 60.
- ¹⁹⁰ Green, 86 (*Italic mine*).
- ¹⁹¹ Hampe, 68.
- ¹⁹² Moody, 64-65.
- ¹⁹³ Green, 93.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 86-87.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 87.

¹⁹⁶ Percentage of NDErs reporting "unusual visual phenomena (e.g. lights, auras)". Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.

¹⁹⁷ Sabom, 38-42; Gallup, 33; Grey, 36; Ring, 45; and Green, 81.

¹⁹⁸ Moody, 30-31; Bush, 177-194; Sabom, 65-67; Ring, 53, 56; Grey, 41-42; and Green, 85.

¹⁹⁹ Moody, 58-59; Ring, 56-57; Grey, 31; Sabom, 65-67; and Green, 86, 92-93.

²⁰⁰ Green, 86; Gallup, 53. For the concept of the light as a destination that "envelopes" the experient see, Ring, 56; Grey, 31; Hampe, 63; and Green, 87.

²⁰¹ Moody, 59.

²⁰² Ring, 40, 56; Grey, 31, 44; Hampe, 39, 63; and Green, 86-87, 93.

²⁰³ See, Grey, 44-45; Gallup, 5; and Moody, 58-89.

²⁰⁴ Green, 87. In his comparative study Greyson asked his participants a question that also had to do with an incredible acquisition of knowledge in the NDE: "Did you suddenly seem to understand everything?" The responses are shown below:

		NDErs (n = 183)	non-NDErs (n = 63)
1. No		46%	86%
2. About myself or others	19%		6%
3. About the universe		35%	8%

The chi-squared measurement for this question was also highly significant; $p. < .005$. (Greyson, p. 156).

²⁰⁵ Ring, 67.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

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- ²⁰⁷ Ibid, 287-288.
- ²⁰⁸ Ibid, 288.
- ²⁰⁹ Ibid, 67.
- ²¹⁰ Grey, 74.
- ²¹¹ Sabom, 70.
- ²¹² Moody, 55.
- ²¹³ Green, 88-90.
- ²¹⁴ Gallup, 89-93.
- ²¹⁵ Hampe, 72-73.
- ²¹⁶ Greyson, 158.
- ²¹⁷ See endnote 20.
- ²¹⁸ Moody, 55.
- ²¹⁹ Ibid, 55-56.
- ²²⁰ Ibid, 57.
- ²²¹ Ring, 67-68. These 8 represented 28% of the 28 respondents who described a specific phenomena in relation to their returning to physical life.
- ²²² Ibid, 68.
- ²²³ Ibid.
- ²²⁴ Ibid, 288. There was one exception to this observation, and that was an experient who "felt she 'had a conversation with God' but who also claimed to have had a vague sense of deceased others. Her perception of them, however, was very indistinct compared to most of the instances where an encounter with a loved one was claimed." (Ibid).
- ²²⁵ Grey, 74. These 10 accounts represent 24% of her total NDE sample. Boundary phenomena are identified by Grey as "phenomenological features that cut across the phases of the NDE and bring them to a conclusion", including, "some kind of barrier", "the 'presence'",

"meeting deceased 'spirits'", the "life review", and the "decision to return". (Grey, 73-74).

²²⁶ Hampe, 67. It is important to note here that throughout his book Hampe continually references to anything that takes place in the NDE after the "exit of the self" (the OBE), as simply being a part of the "life panorama". In fact, this comment about encounters with the "nearest and dearest" was made in Hampe's descriptive section entitled "The Expansion of the Self in Dying", which follows his treatment of the "life panorama". Thus it would seem that the meeting of other beings for Hampe's NDErs is best understood to occur in a place that is more like the heavenly realm, for he described the "life panorama" in terms of the experient's life being "thought and experienced" anew. His examples of this intense experience are precisely the same as those offered by the other researchers concerning the transcendent world/realm of the NDE.

²²⁷ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194-1195.

²²⁸ Moody, 52.

²²⁹ Sabom, 70-73

²³⁰ Ibid, 70.

²³¹ Ibid, 72.

²³² Ibid, 73. The following chart provides a full rundown of the appearances of other entities Sabom's NDErs experienced during their NDEs:

<u>Entity</u>	<u>Number of persons reporting</u>	
spirit of Jesus	2	
presence of Jesus	1	
presence of God	3	
spirit of God		1
spirit of Lord	1	
unknown presence	1	
presence of angel	1	
deceased spirits	10	
living spirits	2	
spirit unknown	5	
presence of unknown nurses		1

(Ibid, 282-284, Table XIII)

²³³ Gallup, 50.

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- ²³⁴ Ibid, 90.
- ²³⁵ Ibid, 101.
- ²³⁶ Ibid. 93.
- ²³⁷ Lindley, 116.
- ²³⁸ Green, 88.
- ²³⁹ Ibid, 89.
- ²⁴⁰ Greyson, 158. See endnote 20.
- ²⁴¹ See Ring, 67; Hampe, 50-51; Gallup, 45-48; Grey, 73-74; and Green, 88-91. The only exception to the finding that the life review takes place at the end of experients' NDEs comes from the research of Sabom. He states that in both of the two cases where it was reported, "the life review was a very early event in the overall NDE and probably began prior to full loss of consciousness." (Sabom, 74).
- ²⁴² Ring, 115.
- ²⁴³ Hampe, 52.
- ²⁴⁴ Ring, 67.
- ²⁴⁵ Ibid, 115.
- ²⁴⁶ Ibid, 117.
- ²⁴⁷ Hampe, 52.
- ²⁴⁸ Green, 91.
- ²⁴⁹ Hampe, 50.
- ²⁵⁰ Ibid, 52.
- ²⁵¹ Moody, 65.
- ²⁵² Ring, 67.
- ²⁵³ Ibid, 117.
- ²⁵⁴ Ibid, 115.
- ²⁵⁵ Sabom, 74 (*Italic mine*).

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- ²⁵⁶ Hampe, 50 (*Italic mine*).
- ²⁵⁷ Gallup, 31.
- ²⁵⁸ Moody, 65.
- ²⁵⁹ Ring, 67. The sequence of the review is sometimes reported to progress backwards, forwards, or is perceived as having "no clear sense of sequence". (Ring, 118).
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid, 117.
- ²⁶¹ Ibid, 118.
- ²⁶² Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ²⁶³ Hampe, 55.
- ²⁶⁴ Sabom, 74.
- ²⁶⁵ Green, 91.
- ²⁶⁶ Gallup, 31.
- ²⁶⁷ Ibid, 48.
- ²⁶⁸ Ibid, 48-49.
- ²⁶⁹ Moody, 64-65.
- ²⁷⁰ Ring, 67.
- ²⁷¹ Hampe, 54.
- ²⁷² Ibid, 55.
- ²⁷³ Hampe, 54.
- ²⁷⁴ Moody, 65.
- ²⁷⁵ Ibid, 68.
- ²⁷⁶ Ibid, 64.
- ²⁷⁷ Ibid, 68.
- ²⁷⁸ Ibid, 65.
- ²⁷⁹ Gallup, 48-49.
- ²⁸⁰ Greyson, 157 (*Italic mine*).

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- ²⁸¹ Ring, 67.
- ²⁸² Ibid, 117.
- ²⁸³ Ibid, 67.
- ²⁸⁴ Ibid, 196 (*Italic mine*).
- ²⁸⁵ Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ²⁸⁶ Hampe, 51.
- ²⁸⁷ Ibid, 67.
- ²⁸⁸ Ibid, 68.
- ²⁸⁹ Ibid, 51 (*Italic mine*).
- ²⁹⁰ Ibid, 56-57.
- ²⁹¹ Ibid, 55.
- ²⁹² Ibid, 59-60.
- ²⁹³ Greyson, 157. See endnote 20.
- ²⁹⁴ Gallup, 32.
- ²⁹⁵ Ring, 67. Ring carried out some rather detailed research into rarely occurring NDE phenomena of "precognitive and prophetic visions". In these cases experiencers sometimes even claimed to have seen the end of the world. For his full treatment of this subject see both of the following articles: Ring, K. (1982) Precognitive and prophetic visions in near-death experiences. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 2 (1), 47-71 and Ring, K. (1988) Prophetic visions in 1988: a critical reappraisal. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 7 (1), 4-18.
- ²⁹⁶ Gallup, 54.
- ²⁹⁷ Greyson, 157. See endnote 20.
- ²⁹⁸ Ring, 1980, 67.
- ²⁹⁹ Six (12%) of the 50 NDEs reported by Green's 41 respondents included the experience of a life review. (Green, 91).

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- ³⁰⁰ Only 2 (3%) of Sabom's NDErs reported a life review. (Sabom, 74).
- ³⁰¹ Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ³⁰² Of Grey's 32 subjects who reported a "boundary" type phenomenon 10 (31%) experienced it as a life review, representing (26%) of her 38 core experiencers. (Grey, 74).
- ³⁰³ Gallup found, as was noted above, that 31% of his NDErs reported "the impression of reviewing or reexamining" their past lives. (Gallup, 31).
- ³⁰⁴ Hampe, 50.
- ³⁰⁵ Greyson, 157. The chi-squared measurement for this question was significant; $p. < 0.01$.
- ³⁰⁶ See endnote 20.
- ³⁰⁷ Ring found that these experiencers also had more vivid and more extensive life reviews.
- ³⁰⁸ Ring 1980, 56-57 (*Italic mine*).
- ³⁰⁹ Ibid, 60 (*Italic mine*).
- ³¹⁰ Grey, 48; Ring, 1980, 60.
- ³¹¹ Ring, 1980, 60.
- ³¹² Ibid, 61.
- ³¹³ Ibid, 60-61. Ten (21%) of his 48 core experiencers reported having this experience. (Ibid).
- ³¹⁴ Grey, 48.
- ³¹⁵ Eighteen percent of Grey's respondents reported "brilliant glowing colors" in this stage of the NDE. (Ibid, 31).
- ³¹⁶ Ibid, 49.
- ³¹⁷ Ibid, 31.
- ³¹⁸ Eighteen percent of Grey's NDErs perceived a "beautiful landscape and buildings". (Ibid).

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- ³¹⁹ Eleven percent of her NDErs reported "heavenly music", (Ibid).
- ³²⁰ Ibid, 49.
- ³²¹ Hampe, 54-55. Hampe also states that in some cases the experient may even have the feeling that "they themselves were the music." (Ibid, 54).
- ³²² Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ³²³ Gallup, 28.
- ³²⁴ Ibid, 102.
- ³²⁵ Ibid, 104.
- ³²⁶ Ibid, 106.
- ³²⁷ Ibid, 32.
- ³²⁸ Ibid, 39.
- ³²⁹ These represent the total group from which 35% were determined to be NDErs.
- ³³⁰ Gallup, 76.
- ³³¹ Sabom, 67-69.
- ³³² Ibid, 67. "A profound sense of reality pervaded the experience, both while it was happening and later, in its recollection. Most persons emphasized at least once in the interview that their NDE was real." (Sabom, 32).
- ³³³ Ibid, 278, Table IX.
- ³³⁴ Lindley, 112.
- ³³⁵ Green, 93.
- ³³⁶ Ibid, 87. Although this study did not provide further information on this type explicitly, in relation to meeting non-earthly entities it did present several NDE accounts which correspond with this phenomenon as presented by the other researchers above. (Green, 86-91).
- ³³⁷ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.

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- ³³⁸ Greyson, 157. See endnote 20.
- ³³⁹ Ring, 1980, 67-81.
- ³⁴⁰ Ibid, 68.
- ³⁴¹ Ibid, 81.
- ³⁴² Ibid, 68.
- ³⁴³ Ibid, 99.
- ³⁴⁴ Eighteen were not asked.
- ³⁴⁵ Ring, 1980, 100. Ring reports that a "cognitive" threshold is some phenomena like the encounter with a presence, a life review and/or an encounter with a deceased loved one. (Ibid).
- ³⁴⁶ Grey, 73.
- ³⁴⁷ Only two (6%) of Grey's 32 NDErs who reported a "boundary" experience perceived it as "some kind of barrier" at the end of their NDEs. These 2 accounts represent 5% of her NDErs. (Grey, 74).
- ³⁴⁸ Ibid, 74. Thirty-two (84%) of her 38 NDErs reported at least one of these "features".
- ³⁴⁹ Ibid, 73.
- ³⁵⁰ Moody, 73.
- ³⁵¹ Ibid, 73-77.
- ³⁵² Sabom, 75-76.
- ³⁵³ Ibid, 76.
- ³⁵⁴ Ibid, 56.
- ³⁵⁵ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194.
- ³⁵⁶ Greyson, 158. The chi-squared measurement for this question was highly significant; $p. < 0.005$. Regarding the positive responses given below by the self-defined Non-NDErs see endnote 20.
- ³⁵⁷ Green, 90.

³⁵⁸ Ring 1980, 68.

³⁵⁹ Grey, 74. These 17 accounts represent 41% of her NDE population. Earlier in her book Grey stated that "a number of respondents" said that they heard a "voice which commanded them to go back and return to their body" (Grey, 38-39), although she does not elaborate upon this. From what was presented above, in the introduction to this section, by Grey, it would seem possible that the "number of cases" that reported this "voice" may all fall into the category she simply labeled "decision to return". (Ibid).

³⁶⁰ Sabom, 75.

³⁶¹ Ibid, 77.

³⁶² Moody, 79-80 (*Italic mine*).

³⁶³ Ibid, 78.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 81.

³⁶⁵ Ring, 1980, 68.

³⁶⁶ Gallup, 109.

³⁶⁷ Sabom, 75.

³⁶⁸ Ring, 1980, 68.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 92.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 81.

³⁷¹ Lindley, 115.

³⁷² Ibid, 116.

³⁷³ Gallup, 103. Gallup reports that the "ability to choose to stay in the extradimensional world or to come back" is common in many of his NDEr statements. (Ibid, 35).

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 109. Gallup found that "the dead or near-dead humans who participate in these scenes are as subject to the dictates of those above them as anyone else." (Ibid).

³⁷⁵ Green, 88-91 (*Italic mine*).

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- ³⁷⁶ Ring, 1980, 60 (*Italic mine*).
- ³⁷⁷ Grey, 48.
- ³⁷⁸ Ibid, 49. (*Italic mine*).
- ³⁷⁹ Lindley, 115 (*Italic mine*).
- ³⁸⁰ Moody, 77-78.
- ³⁸¹ Hampe, 88.
- ³⁸² Ring, 1980, 100.
- ³⁸³ Gallup, 28.
- ³⁸⁴ Lindley, 115.
- ³⁸⁵ Greyson and Stevenson, 1194. Of this same group who found re-entry "easy" 71% (41/58) experienced it as "instantaneous".
- ³⁸⁶ Moody, 82.
- ³⁸⁷ Ibid, 83.
- ³⁸⁸ It is interesting to note here, again, that these same four studies, along with Moody's, were identified as our "core group" of studies.
- ³⁸⁹ The weighted means for the 1) the perception of the NDE Presence, and 2) all non-physical NDE beings are not included in this table since this data is included in the category of phenomena labeled "Perception of non-visualized and/or visualized non-physical Beings".

CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF THE NDE TYPOLOGY

1.0 Introduction

We have finally reached the point where we will be able to determine the degree to which the research based conceptuality of the NDE content, presented typologically in this chapter, corresponds to the concepts which, as we saw in chapter one, many scholars believe render the survival of physical death a logical possibility. Seeking here to understand just how such an NDE notion relates to our substantive question - On what grounds can we assert and intelligibly describe the continued existence of a disembodied being, as a particular person, through time? - we should also begin to possess a critical understanding of what the NDE actually is. Such a perspective, if it is to be critically *informed*, can not be founded on an analysis of the NDE types in isolation but must judge these according to the context in which they arise and present themselves. Therefore, it will not be until the end of chapter six, after these context issues have been investigated, that our philosophical analysis here will truly bear fruit. Metaphorically speaking, we tilled the ground in chapter one (identifying the theological problem and establishing the philosophical prolegomena), planted the seeds in chapter two (determining the validity of our NDE data), watched our plants growing in the previous chapter (presenting the NDE typology) and now we are ready to begin the critical process of

assessing the nature of our crop, so that later we will know how best to harvest and make use of its fruits.

2.0 The Analysis

Let us begin then by reminding ourselves of what we might call the fundamental criteria for positing disembodied survival of physical death. At the most basic level, a person must be conceptualised in dualistic terms. This means that before death a person is a composite being (consisting of a physical body and an incorporeal mind/soul) whose incorporeal part, the "real" self/person, will continue to exist beyond the demise of his/her body. Indeed, in many different ways our NDE typology suggests a positive correspondence with these ideas. For instance, in reference to autoscopic/naturalistic NDE phenomena, the experient claims to "view" his/her own body from a position outside of it, and is unable to communicate with, or have any effect on, people and things in the physical world. In many cases NDErs have the perception of having new, seemingly non-material bodies. Even if the experient believes him/herself to be something akin to "pure mind", we have seen how his/her continued, disembodied existence is further suggested in terms of greatly enhanced, and/or newly acquired, perceptual and cognitive abilities. Of course the precise relationship of this phenomena to our philosophical criteria centres around the notion that such phenomena are supposedly experienced at the same time that, in reference to the physical body, the experient should have been unconscious. If we continue by reflecting on the nature

of the transcendent NDE types, we find even more points of agreement. In a realm described as being non-physical experients encounter and interact with other seemingly non-physical persons, which, frequently, appear to be the "real", physically deceased people these NDErs had known when these people were alive. The experient's physically based life on earth is usually the subject of such interaction, the contents of which presuppose that a separation of the real person from his/her body has taken place and that the experient is presently existing in a non-physically state. This is also assumed in the NDErs' experiences in their communications with the Being of Light, the Presence and other spiritual/religious NDE personalities. In reference simply to its descriptive name, that the NDE "life review" supports a dualistic conception of personhood can hardly be doubted. For some NDErs the end of their "out-of-body-experience" may provide the most disappointing confirmation of the correlation between the NDE and the dualists, as they experience the pain of "going back into" their physical bodies. And lastly, many would see the NDErs' inability to express precisely what happened to them, supposedly while unconscious, as a confirmation that the "real" person had left his/her physical body and had been in a realm far beyond his/her known, physical world. Clearly then, there are many basic aspects of the NDE which seem to support the fundamental survival criteria relating to a dualistic conceptuality of personhood. Yet, just as we deemed it necessary in chapter one to investigate the logical possibility of a person's survival of physical

death beyond this basic point, here too we must delve deeper.

Examining the concept of disembodied survival in detail we saw that, whether a psychological or transcendent approach was taken, the survivor's ability to have experiences was conditionally necessary. Given that our survivor needed to be the subject of experiences, we explored the existential question, asking what kind of "world" our survivor might have such that he/she could be described as an existing "person". One might be tempted to say that if H.H. Price were alive today he would probably find the NDEr's world to be, in many ways, the confirmation of his mind-dependent, post-mortem world theory. If we focus on the transcendent portion of NDEs, it is true that the experient is always at the centre of the events which takes place in this realm. This strongly suggests that the NDE world is formed, or shaped, by the experient's conscious and subconscious desires. Price's speculations might be further supported by the NDE in that the inhabitants of the NDEr's world are almost exclusively beings already "existing" in the particularly experient's memories. Paul Badham has made this point in a number of ways, e.g., (meeting deceased relatives is) "clearly...mind-dependent in that relatives are seen in the form in which they were remembered by the percipient" and "clearly these (religious figures) are culture-based hallucinations reflecting the person's particular religious background." ¹ However, Badham is not content to allow such observations to go unqualified, since, in order to support his Cartesian conception of what persons really

are, he seeks to posit these figures' existence outside of a subjective NDE world. One of the ways he does this is to argue for what he believes is the religious figures' "uniformity of function" among all NDErs, and thus their "object" reality. He further supports Price's idea of a shared, mind-dependent world by pointing out that many children who have NDEs do not "hallucinate images of their parents" but claim to have interacted with 1) previously unknown, deceased relatives and 2) religious figures.² Undoubtedly things are beginning to get a bit problematic.

In their cross-cultural study of American and Indian NDErs Stevenson and Pasricha discovered that while the religious/spiritual entities in the American NDEs almost always functioned as highly compassionate spiritual advisors, those reported by the Indian NDErs functioned in a manner that was much less, let us say, congenial. Unlike the American spiritual entities, who invariably welcomed and assisted the experient, the Indian NDE entities more or less forcefully took the experient to a higher spiritual being which tended, again unlike in the American NDEs, to reprimand the spiritual guide(s) for bringing the wrong individual into the afterlife.³ This simply does not agree with Badham's point that "In all cases the religious personage is seen as a radiant welcoming figure, a being of light and grace. In other words the uniformity of function is more striking than the difference of nomenclature."⁴ His support for the literal disembodied existence of the NDEr is called into question further if we ask, Why is it that adult NDErs do not, like the children, encounter such supposedly distant, long dead

relatives? These are not easy issues to deal with, or even investigate, but it does highlight the problems involved with assuming the existence of a shared, mind-dependent world.

As we have already noted, the experient is at the centre of his/her NDE world (thus supporting the idea of a mind-depend image world), yet, as we have also just observed, in contrast to Price's model, its contents or material seem to extend beyond the NDEr's *memories*. The seriousness of this (existential) problem can also be demonstrated in reference to other NDE phenomena. For example, if experiencers' disembodied "body image" is dependent on their subjectively grounded personal identities, then what do we make of those cases in which experiencers imaged NDE bodies corresponded to their physical bodies yet 1) lacked all the "defects" of their physical bodies, and/or 2) possessed new or tremendously enhanced capabilities? Why is it that all NDErs do not image themselves a body in the first place? If the NDEr's putative disembodied existence is constructed from his/her own memories, then what do we say about the NDE's ineffability, one of its most fundamental, practically definitive, characteristics? Unless one was prepared to posit the philosophically suspect notion of a shared, mind-dependent world, it is difficult to see how one might deal with the existential question in regard to the contents of the NDEr's world in this way.

Trying to come to grips with the form of the NDE world in the context of disembodied survival of death, is perhaps even more wrought with problems than its contents. At the heart of the matter is the realisation that the NDE is almost completely externally

intentioned. This is one of the more critical reasons why the idea that disembodied, post-mortem persons shape their worlds from their own conscious and subconscious desires can not be harmonised with a great deal of the NDE. From the very start the NDEr is surprised by what is taking place, or, we might say, *what has happened* to him/her. At the very end, most experients are either sent back against their will (e.g., "It's not your time yet" or, for Indian NDErs, "You're not the right person who is supposed to die now") or simply find themselves "back in" their physical bodies due to no known effort on their own part. As for what comes in-between, virtually each type suggests the same thing. For example, those experiencing the special NDE (Being of) Light are almost always uncontrollably drawn to/into it. It is the norm for NDErs to describe how astonished they were by the undeserved love they subsequently received during such encounters with the special NDE Light and Presence. Experients frequently speak of how unexpected the selection of images making up the life review were, although they came to understand that something external to themselves had chosen the best ones in relation to what this external something wanted to communicate. If it is true that, according to psychologists, children below the age of 7 years "cannot understand death"⁵, then how do we reconcile the high level of consistency which exists between their NDE worlds and the adult NDE worlds? What do we make of the overwhelmingly positive affective nature of the NDE? Do NDErs really think that highly of themselves to form such a paradise-like world? Granted that there are negative NDEs, as we will see below, these tend to be not just mildly negative, but,

typically, down right hellish. Would we not expect that, if disembodied survivors of physical death formed their worlds from their own desires, there would be more of a continuum concerning the affective structure of individually formed NDE worlds? Why is it that so many NDErs who describe existing, if only momentarily, in a "paradise" or "heaven" stress that it was nothing like what they had ever imagined, while negative NDErs speak of being in a place which was exactly like the descriptions of "hell" they were familiar with?

Perhaps some of the questions we have just brought up could be addressed in a rational manner and the form of the NDErs' worlds, therefore, still attributed in some qualified sense to their "desires". Nevertheless, the likelihood of satisfactorily answering all of them in a way which would be internally consistent is rather unlikely. In short, the degree to which the NDE itself (i.e., its contents) can be harmonised with the idea that the content and form of the NDEr's world is based on his/her memories and desires, respectively, certainly appears to be very low. We might have expected this given our observation in chapter one that most of us, who are interested in intelligibly describing what the nature of another (post-mortem) world is, would have to admit only ever having had experiences of one, i.e., the world in which we presently exist. Ultimately this is an issue then of knowledge. We will now examine what was identified in chapter one as the epistemological question associated with survival: How does one determine that the subject of post-mortem, disembodied existence is the same person as the now (deceased) pre-mortem person in question?

The presence of an individual's unique, personal memories is, without a doubt, the criterion most would appealed to in order to re-identify a disembodied person through time. Though, without publicly available evidence, which another person might use to verify such memories, memory has been shown to be of little value in this regard. Butler's argument - that personal memory does not establish, but presupposes, personal identity - not withstanding and granted the putative presence of experiencers' personal memories during their NDEs (as indicated above in several places), we will have to reject this as a survival criterion which has a positive correspondence with the NDE content. Since, during their NDEs, supposedly disembodied experiencers are never perceived by living, embodied persons, the only sense in which the NDEers' memories could be validated would be via their interaction with other NDE entities. To assert a positive relationship between memory as a criterion of the logical possibility of survival and the NDE content based on the experiencer's interaction with other NDE entities is simply to beg the question of these other NDE entities' identities themselves. Far from solving our problem, this leaves us going in philosophical circles.

Some have applied a method which could be described as being backwards, founding the experiencer's NDE identity on the notion of the experiencer's memories of events which took place while he/she was "unconscious", and, it is therefore reasoned, existing in a disembodied state. Certainly, it is insisted, the experiencer's personal memories could be checked against publicly available evidence relevant to what the experiencer

describes as having had transpired in the physical world/environment at that time (i.e. during autoscopic NDE phenomena). Indeed, doctors, nurses, loved ones and others have been amazed by what experiencers have been able to describe taking place during the time of their putative out-of-the-body-experience. However, as we will discuss more fully in chapter six, there has yet to be anything more than anecdotal evidence to support the veracity of this phenomenon. Even if such "memories" were confirmed, it would be a completely different, almost impossible, task to show that such information was acquired by the experiencer while he/she was in a disembodied state.

Again, because NDErs are unable to make themselves (as disembodied selves) known to living, embodied persons we are also forced to say that there can be no correspondence between the NDE and the re-identification of disembodied beings along the lines of unique personal characteristics or personality traits, aptitudes, and/or skills. The standard psychological approaches (i.e., memory and character) to the epistemological issues relating to disembodied survival are thereby seen to be unsuitable as concepts which would make the par/eschatological contextualization of the NDE itself reasonable. As for the substantial-yet-incorporeal mind/soul and un-analyzable-given "I", both could very well have a constructive correspondence to the NDE, since, as transcendent approaches to the question of survival, they make no claim to solve the epistemological issue in relation to empirical evidence. Both, ultimately, ground personal identity on consciousness itself and therefore the epistemological

issue becomes, for all intense purposes, practically relegated to the existential and ontological. In other words, since we will never be able to directly experience John Smith's consciousness itself, or his awareness of being the subject of a unique string of experiences, we can only talk about re-identifying him in terms of how reasonable this definition of personhood is and whether such a definition allows for disembodied existence following physical death. It is true that we have already dealt with the existential question above, yet it was specifically Price's theory which we found largely incompatible with the NDE content. Thus, in seeking to complete our analysis, we will actually move on to consider the ontological question more directly, remaining open to existential considerations.

We have now come to the spot where all the concepts related to survival have their starting point, or, from another perspective, all such concepts must lead. What then can be said about the NDEr and his/her relationship to the ontological character of the transcendent notion of a person's survival of physical death in a disembodied state?

When we summarised the NDE typology one of the *definitive* NDE characteristics was given as the experient's belief that, throughout the entire experience, he/she seemed to exist outside of his/her physical body as an "essential self". No matter whether it was an autoscopic, transcendent or combined NDE, this was the case. Reflecting on this NDE characteristic, Badham proposes that "if 'out-of-the-body' experiences (during NDEs) are correctly described as such" - i.e., that NDErs literally "go out of their bodies, observe

the resuscitation attempts and begin to move on to some other mode of existence" - then the popular definition of "what it means to be a human person is radically challenged."⁶ The "definition" he is referring to is that a person's brain and mind are identical. Therefore Badham's statement implies that if NDErs literally leave their bodies then it would no longer be reasonable to reduce the ontological question of personhood to questions grounded on one's physical existence. What we are interested in here though is not whether or not the NDE disproves the mind/brain identity theory, but how similar the experient's being during his/her NDE - what we will continue to refer to from now on as the "essential self" - is to the concept of a disembodied soul/mind or I, a concept which those who reject the mind/brain identity theory tend to employ if arguing for the rationality of a person's survival of physical death.

Much like the general conception of the soul described in chapter one, the essential self could easily be thought of as a "simple entity or 'substance', existing independently...underlying and 'owning' the individual's diverse and changing mental states and attributes." Because it is grounded on the NDEr's putative state of "consciousness" *simultaneous* to his/her physical body's "unconsciousness", the essential self would appear to have a great affinity with the Cartesian soul. Descartes found it unreasonable to doubt that he was thinking and therefore that he existed, thus it seems reasonable that many, if not most, Cartesians hold that thinking or consciousness is of the essence of human being itself. We have seen in

the previous chapters that NDErs describe the essential self along very similar lines. From the beginning of the NDE the experient can not deny that he/she is having "real" experiences, experiences not facilitated by or dependent upon his/her physical body in any immediately conceivable way. Hence, for the NDEr perception or consciousness itself becomes the very essence of his/her existence or being itself. Let us take a more detailed look at why there is such an affinity between the essential self and the Cartesian soul or mind.

It is clear that the NDEr, as an essential self, does not rely on his/her physical body or the physical world in order to positively identify the existence of his/her being. For many NDErs, their physical bodies and world actually help them to understand what they are not. The NDEr's being is understood principally according to a radical change in the objects of their consciousness; they perceive 1) themselves as being either in a non-material "form" or as pure mind and 2) the context of their being, or their "world", as being either partially or completely trans-physical. The nature of the essential self is further delineated according to the relationship between the altered self and its context, particularly in terms of the experient's expanded and/or reduced perceptual and interactive capacities. For instance as we have seen in our detailed discussion of the NDE OBE, in those cases when the essential self retains his/her perception of the physical world it is invariably greatly enhanced (e.g. a birds-eye-view and ESP abilities). However, although the essential self's perception of it is heightened, it is not able to interact with this world.

We should also recall that at least a third of all essential selves are not able to even perceive the physical world (i.e. transcendent NDEs). As we have seen above, for all of those who encounter the transcendent, NDE world - this includes those who experience the physical world and this one (combined NDEs) - the essential self's perceptual and interactive capacities in this non-physical context are tremendously enhanced. Given the object of the essential self's consciousness and the nature of its perceptual and trans-physical interactive capacities, it is no wonder that NDErs describe their NDE being, or their essential self, in language which presupposes their existence in terms of incorporeal consciousness. As a physicalist understanding of one's personhood is no longer tenable it is also hardly surprising that most experiencers believe that, during their NDEs, they were indeed "dead". Could a person fear the event of their physical death as the end of their being if he/she is convicted that one's essential being, who one really is, is based on incorporeal consciousness? As we will see in the next chapter, most, if not all, experiencers do claim to have completely lost any fear of death they might have had before having their NDEs.

We saw at the beginning of our analysis that other aspects of the NDE content certainly reinforce this Cartesian-like ontological perspective. Arguably, the most significant of these includes 1) the essential self's encounters with other "real" yet non-physical persons and 2) the consistent focus of all NDE encounters on the subject of whether or not the essential self will "return" to physical existence, as a

sufficient, though not necessary, condition of personal being. Alluded to already though is the apparent philosophical inconsistencies involved in identifying the Cartesian soul/mind itself with an essential self which has the ability to exist, even if in a limited sense, in the physical world (i.e., Autoscopic and Combined NDEs). To reconcile this aspect of the essential self with the incorporeal nature of the Cartesian "real person" would be to reconcile one of the most contentious issues debated between not just Cartesians and non-Cartesians, but between most dualists and non-dualists generally.

Faced with the same challenge, we could also argue for a similar level of similarity between the essential self and the Platonic soul. If it could be shown that the essential self is not necessarily defined by the experient's mental states and attributes, we might even find that this transcendent notion of personhood is more appealing than the Cartesian. Perhaps this could be done based on many NDErs' claims to have "become one" with other NDE entities (usually the Being of Light and/or Presence) and/or even NDE world objects, music or entire settings. Although epistemologically puzzling, this suggests a type of personhood, or being, which is capable of transcending what we would normally consider the boundaries of one's consciousness. Referring back to our observations in chapter one, we recognise that Plato's identification of the "soul" as the *principle of life for the individual*, as found in some of his writings, might allow for a better correspondence with the essential self, in that its existence in the physical world might then become much less problematic.

Such a move would probably come at the expense though of the favourable aspects of designating consciousness as an essential aspect of being a person.

Problematic though they are, the Cartesian and Platonic dualistic notions of personhood themselves are clearly quite similar to the essential self of the NDE. Turning our attention to the transcendent notion that a person is simply a given "I", we are still faced with our existential problem. The "I" does enjoy the same relationship with the NDE essential self as the Platonic soul though, inasmuch as one's being is not, technically, dependent on one's consciousness. Yet, by defining personal being along the lines of the brute, analysable fact of one's awareness of being such and such a person, it is hard to see how one can get away with not implying that consciousness is a necessary condition of being. Noted already in chapter one, it would seem then that "I" is actually no different in this way from the Cartesian soul/mind.

Hence, given its obvious significance concerning the question of personhood itself, what might prove quite fruitful is an exploration of the NDEr's ontological nature. If, for the sake of argument, we were to set aside the question of whether or not the essential self must be literally disembodied and/or incorporeal, the NDE might provide us with an opportunity to fruitfully examine the central issue of the survival question, the issue which philosophers for ages have believed is also one of the central issues of "normal", embodied human being, i.e., the ontological question of personal identity, or personhood, itself.⁷

An ontological investigation of personal identity would certainly be a worthy way to pursue the meaning of

the NDE, and by taking a phenomenological approach one would actually be forced to suspend one's judgement regarding the literalness of the essential self's incorporeal existence. Yet, before any such activity can be (seriously) considered we need to continue to pursue our objective of determining whether or not the predominant par/eschatological contextualization of the NDE is indeed justifiable.

3.0 Conclusion

Thus far, our investigation has shown that there is an extremely low degree of compatibility between the NDE content and the logical possibility of the survival of physical death. In particular, we found that in reference to both the relevant existential and epistemological issues, the NDE could not be harmonised with the psychological approaches. The transcendent answer to the existential question, particularly in the form of Price's theory, also proved to be negatively correlated with the NDE. However, we found that if we limited ourselves to the ontological question itself⁸, the NDE content seemed to be quite analogous to several philosophically respected conceptions of personhood supporting the rationality of survival. The primary point of difficulty in even this correlation centred on harmonising 1) incorporeal consciousness as a necessary condition of existence, with 2) the essential self's ability to exist in, and perceive, the physical world. Reflecting on both the critical role such an issue plays in formulating an intelligible ontology of survival and the extremely low degree of compatibility between the NDE content and the existential and epistemological structure of the rational conceptions of survival which have been investigated, we can conclude that it would be quite inappropriate to contextualise the NDE in par/eschatological terms. The only acceptable reason one could give for not rejecting the interpretation of the NDE content within an exclusively par/eschatological context would be that the research data relating to the context of this NDE event⁹ provides virtually incontestable evidence that NDErs actually did suffer

physical death, or at least, literally experienced the first few moments of being dead. Therefore, in the next two chapters we will study the NDE context, not only with a desire to test the validity of a par/eschatological interpretation of the NDE, but with the expectation that we might further understand what we have found to be its highly intriguing ontological character. Perhaps this will prove to be a much more appropriate context in which new, more accurate, interpretations of the NDE can be formulated.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Badham, P. (1990) *Near-death experiences, beliefs about life after death, and the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. International Buddhist Study Center, Tokyo Honganji, 8-9.
- ² Ibid, 8.
- ³ Stevenson, I., and Pasricha, S. (1986) Near-death experiences in India - a preliminary report. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 174 (3), 167-168.
- ⁴ Badham, 9.
- ⁵ Ibid, 8.
- ⁶ Ibid, 7.
- ⁷ See Butler, J (1897) *The works of Joseph Butler, D.C.L.* volume one. edited by Gladstone, W.E., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 17-40 and 317-325.
- ⁸ We observed that the ontological question was practically inseparable from the epistemological in relation to the transcendent approaches.
- ⁹ The NDE "context", as noted in chapter one, represents the situations which "cause" the NDE event as well as the "effects" the NDE event subsequently has on experiencers.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

1.0 Introduction

This portrait of the NDE after-effects is based primarily on twelve pieces of research, spanning a fifteen year period, all of which had to meet the following criteria: 1) the NDE had to be the primary topic of the study or a major sub-topic of a larger study, 2) the purpose of the study or sub-study had to center on describing the NDE after-effects themselves (e.g. studies that were solely interpretative and explanatory were not included), 3) the study population had to be relatively large (i.e. 25 or more subjects), and 4) the NDE data had to be derived only from persons specifically solicited for the given NDE study.¹ Unlike the typological data, which have been relatively easy to compare due to the consistency of the NDE phenomena themselves, information concerning the NDE after-effects can vary significantly from study to study. This is due primarily to the fact that the researchers have much more freedom to choose what particular aspects of the NDErs' lives they would like to investigate. Thus, where appropriate other studies, which could not meet all of these inclusion criteria, will also be used as minor, supplementary sources in order to present the NDE after-effect phenomena as thoroughly as possible.

Since the information concerning the NDE after-effects is based, almost exclusively, on NDErs' subjective self-reports, it would not be unreasonable to be highly sceptical of its validity. The same is true

for the data used in chapter three, yet, because of the relative invariance of reported phenomena among such a large and diverse pool of subjects, it is not the validity of the phenomena's existence which has become the issue of serious NDE research but their interpretation. Likewise, as we will see below, there is indeed a unique set of post-NDE phenomena which has been consistently experienced by a large percentage of NDErs regardless of any other shared demographic factor. However, as we have pointed out already above, unlike the phenomena making up the NDE content the NDE after-effects can be directly or indirectly observed by another person, thus making it theoretically possible to confirm the existence of such after-effects. This is precisely what Ring did. Employing a detailed questionnaire, Ring asked those who knew the experiencers both before and after their NDEs about eleven separate characteristics which corresponded with various items these experiencers had responded to in his study. It was concluded that "overall, the changes that NDErs attribute to themselves are also perceived and corroborated by individuals who knew them well (and, presumable, usually best) both before and after their experience."²

Based on more than twenty years of intensive work with NDErs Moody found himself absolutely sure of at least one NDE "fact":

There is one common element in all NDEs: they transform the people who have them. In my twenty years of intense exposure to NDErs, I have yet to find one who hasn't had a very deep and positive transformation as a result of his experience.³

It has been found that for many experiencers their NDEs inspire a reorientation towards self, living, and death which is many times both dramatic and long lasting.⁴ In some cases this is nothing short of a transformation of the experiencer's entire personality, effecting not only his/her attitudes, but personal values, beliefs, and behaviour as well. In this chapter it will be seen that, no matter what the extent of observable change is which takes place following the NDE, it will be determined primarily by the conceptual changes which experiencers consciously make, as they seek to understand what happened to them during their NDEs. One might think of the NDE after-effects then as an experientially based complex of choices. However, we will also see that the NDE after-effects can indeed be differentiated from the conceptually based after-effects reported by those who have come close to death but who did not report having had an NDE (i.e. non-NDEers). At the research based, "empirical" level the post-event changes which NDEers experience and non-NDEers do not have to do with the presence of paranormal/psychic phenomena in NDEers' lives which were not there before the NDE event. As in the NDE itself, these phenomena are distinguished by both their transcendent qualities and externally intentioned manifestations. We will commence our investigation of the context of the NDE event now, focusing our attention on what the researchers have specifically found concerning these "given" NDE after-effects as well as those which are "chosen".⁵

2.0 Reorientation to Self, Living, and Death

The trauma of having a close brush with death facilitates a positive change in one's personal and value orientations, *regardless of whether or not an NDE is also experienced*. For example, Ring found that NDErs and non-NDErs reported a relatively similar post-near-death-incident change in terms of 1) an "increased appreciation of life", 2) a "renewed sense of purpose", 3) being a "stronger person", and 4) being a "more loving, caring" person. Although such changes are comparable quantitatively, the character, or depth, of these appear to be much different between NDErs and non-NDErs.⁶ These qualitative distinctions are highlighted below, particularly as the NDE after-effects are described in reference to their relationship to phenomena experienced during the NDE itself.

Following their close brush with death a great many NDErs find that they have a renewed appreciation for both the value of life and those aspects of living that make life meaningful.⁷ It is not surprising then that one of the more popularised after-effects of the NDE is an increased value placed on relationships with and service to fellow human beings. This purportedly includes a distinctively higher level of concern and love openly expressed and acted upon in day-to-day living. Not only is love more valued but it is common for experiencers to report that their ability, or capacity, for love and service has significantly increased.⁸ Corresponding to this increase in the value given to people and relationships is a marked decrease in the

value placed on material things, especially in relation to the contribution they make to life's meaningfulness and their acquisition as one of the most important goals in life.⁹ Compassionate, tolerant, open and altruistic are a few of the terms typically used by the researchers to describe this aspect of the chosen NDE after-effects.¹⁰

In conjunction with an invigorated appreciation for life and relationships, many NDErs find that their attitudes towards their own lives are significantly changed. One result of this is that the experient's self-image becomes much more positive. For example there is often an increase in NDErs' feelings of self-acceptance, self-confidence, and self-worth¹¹, whereas concern with personal status and the need for acceptance by others decreases.¹² This usually corresponds to an increase in a feeling of inner strength and a determination to live in accordance with a transformed value system, regardless of life's continual challenges to the contrary.¹³ Given these changes, it is typical for NDErs to maintain that they are not morally superior to others, that their NDEs have not purified or perfected them, and that they themselves require much growth before they will feel prepared to leave their earthly lives.¹⁴ This new sense and understanding of self commonly leads not only to a change in behaviour but to a definite change in personal identity.¹⁵

Cardiologist and NDE researcher Michael Sabom observed:

Almost every subject interviewed in this study indicated, in his own way, that his NDE had been a truly remarkable and important event in his life. Some even describe it as the "peak" event, which had done more to shape the depth

and direction of life goals and attitudes than any previous single experience.¹⁶

This shaping of the "depth and direction of life goals" is a major theme in most experiencers' descriptions of how the NDE has effected them.¹⁷ In some cases this can be linked with experiencers' encounters with the NDE "afterlife", especially if they sense that the traditional concept of "unilateral judgement" has been replaced by a kind of self-development with self-actualisation as the goal. Indeed, this is most likely one of the primary reasons why many NDEers tend to express their conviction that the "goal", or purpose, of life has to do with growing in love and gaining (spiritual) knowledge. According to Moody's NDEers these are the two most important personal qualities in the afterlife.¹⁸ Beyond the general influence the character of the NDE afterlife has on the NDEer's understanding of his/her life's purpose is a much more specific, apparently NDE inspired, conviction: the majority of NDEers reportedly believe that they have a unique purpose to fulfil before their earthly lives end. In some cases this attitude seems to be arrived at, during the NDE, via the experiencer's own contemplation of his/her earthly life, in the context of various NDE phenomena, e.g., 1) enhanced cognitive processes, 2) the acquisition of vast amounts of knowledge, and/or 3) the life review.¹⁹ Many experiencers also believe that, during their NDEs, it was explicitly revealed to them that "God" has a definite plan for their earthly lives, a "divinely inspired mission" to complete.²⁰

It is typical for NDEers to say that they possess certain "gifts and talents" which, until their NDEs, went

unnoticed and/or were significantly neglected. As Grey put it "the advent of the NDE somehow awakens an awareness that these abilities have been given...for a purpose and are to be developed and used in the service of humanity."²¹ Whether they are called "gifts", "talents", or "abilities" NDE revealed, highly personal attributes often become decisive factors in both the experiencers' understanding of the meaning of their lives and the shaping of their personal identities.²²

In existential terms then it is easy to see now why the NDE is frequently the trigger for a "strong inner drive for understanding". This is an aspiration in which there is a shift from the "acquisition of conventional sources of self-esteem" to a quest for knowledge about life's ultimates.²³ Ring reported that NDErs as a whole "seek to know the *purpose for which they live and are to live*; they quest for a deeper understanding of the nature of life and for a higher consciousness by which to penetrate to the hidden significance of things."²⁴ Based on years of highly respected study of the NDE, Ring found that this search is commonly begun in the attempt by experiencers to make sense of their own NDEs.²⁵ In other words, for many NDErs this quest to uncover the meaning one's life, and life in general, is one of the definitive, *chosen* NDE after-effects.

It is relatively common for NDErs to actively alter their lives accordingly, for instance with a switch of career and/or a reorganisation of time spent outside of the workplace.²⁶ The changes facilitated by NDErs' attentiveness to, and action in pursuing, the meaning of life are most explicitly expressed, though, in spiritual terms.²⁷ For one group of NDErs who were specifically

asked about it, the "message" of the NDE was expressed as the exhortation to "spread God's love".²⁸ As a "spiritual journey", the NDE quest can take many forms. This might encompass getting involved with a church, counselling, doing "healing work", becoming a speaker or writer on spiritual/religious topics, or simply engaging in spiritual/religious communication within one's circle of family and friends.²⁹ For the majority of NDEr's who undertake it, such a quest invariably inspired by more than terrestrial concerns, for most immediately, the NDE effects a dramatic reorientation of the experient's perception of the relationship between life and death generally. It is at this point that NDErs and non-NDErs decisively part company, since, even quantitatively, compared to non-NDErs, after their NDEs, NDErs report a highly significant 1) decreased fear of death, 2) increased belief in a positive afterlife, 3) increase in experiences of psychic/spiritual phenomena, and 4) increase in spirituality.

A change in, and in most cases a complete loss of, the fear of death is probably the most pervasive of all NDE after-effects. Researchers have found that this change is significant in two important ways: 1) in relation to the experient's pre-NDE versus post-NDE death anxiety; and 2) in relation to other persons that have had a verge-of-death experience without having an NDE (i.e. non-NDErs).³⁰ The reason for this unique, dramatic, and long-lasting³¹ decrease in NDErs' fear of death is reported to be intimately related to experients' post-NDE conception of the death itself.³² Granted that this conception is, for most experients, explicitly and

distinctively positive this observation is certainly quite reasonable

In order to get a flavour for one of the most frequently described conceptualities of death born of the NDE we turn to a brief analysis by the "father" of modern-day NDE studies. According to Moody, after the NDE the experiencer usually has no doubt that he/she will survive bodily death. Such models of death as "annihilation", "sleeping" and "forgetting" were almost always rejected by his NDEers, while analogies such as a "transition from one state to another, or...an entry into a higher state of consciousness or being" were common. Even his experiencers who maintained a "traditional conviction" concerning the nature of the afterlife before their NDEs seemed to move "away from it to some degree" afterwards. In this respect, none of Moody's experiencers described the "mythological picture" of a heaven and hell. The traditional religious "reward-punishment model" was "abandoned and disavowed" by many of his NDEers.³³ It was asserted that this change was based largely on NDEers' encounters with a non-judgmental, otherworldly being or presence - the being of light in many cases - who loved and accepted them even when their "sinfulness" was exposed. As was mentioned above, following their NDEs many experiencers do have a new model and understanding of the afterlife where, for many of Moody's NDEers, "cooperative development towards the ultimate end of self-realization" replaced the concept of unilateral judgement.³⁴

Not all NDEers, though, find that their fear of death has been reduced because of a reconceptualization of death and the afterlife like the one just described.

Although less common, there are NDErs whose reduced or lost death anxiety is expressed in the context of a new-found, NDE inspired belief in God or a strengthening of their similar pre-NDE religious beliefs.³⁵ At this stage it is best to keep in mind that in almost every case the NDEr's fear of death is greatly decreases apparently because, at the very least, his/her pre-NDE understanding of death could not be reconciled with the content of his/her NDE.³⁶

Even though generally, experiencers report an extremely decreased level of death anxiety and increased belief that death is, barring the actual physical trauma that might precipitate it, a positive experience, they are also usually adamant about their desire to live each moment to the full, to enjoy a long earthly life.³⁷ It seems that without exception, NDEs inspire the will to live not the will to die. In fact, NDEs have even been found to be a potent deterrent of a suicidal disposition.³⁸

To reiterate a vital point, NDErs report, overwhelmingly, their certainty that there is a continuation of life after physical death. Compared to non-NDErs, and their own pre-NDE beliefs, the degree of this after-effect is highly significant. Non-NDErs, though, report relatively no change in their belief in life after death following their close brushes with death.³⁹ One researcher found that, unlike before their NDEs took place, afterwards, experiencers possess a much greater belief in life after death compared to the general public as well.⁴⁰ As was the case for the NDEr's loss of death anxiety, this change in belief concerning the existence of life after death has been attributed,

primarily, to the content of the NDE itself.⁴¹ Recalling our continuing investigation of the contextualization of the NDE in terms of disembodied survival, we should note the ontological significance of such after-effects. Certainly, the experient's loss of death anxiety and new-found certainty that he/she will continue to be even after his/her physical death suggest that most NDErs have also experienced a profound change in their understanding of what it means to be a person. It may not be completely unreasonable, in light of our analysis of the ontological question in the previous chapter, to propose that such unique, NDE-specific after-effects evidence an alteration/enhancement of the experient's being itself facilitated by the NDE event. No doubt this sounds a bit extreme, yet the next class of NDE-specific after-effects we will look at, if the experients and researchers are to be believed, are no less incredible.

3.0 Psychic/Spiritual Phenomena

Following their NDEs the majority of people will experience an increase of psychic/spiritual phenomena in their lives,⁴² even though, it has been found that, prior to their NDEs these people do not encounter any more incidents of such phenomena than the general public.⁴³ Experients are also significantly more likely to report such phenomena after their NDEs than non-NDErs.⁴⁴ Providing statistical information for various paranormal phenomena experienced by NDErs both before and after their NDEs, Table XXVI offers some rich food for thought. The first nine items are taken from Sutherland's 1989 study and the remaining six from Greyson's⁴⁵. All items

evidence a statistically significant change in reported phenomena for NDErs. The only exception is found in the category "communication with the dead", which also showed a change but one which was not significant.⁴⁶ It would seem that either these people have actually been altered by their NDEs on a fundamental level and/or that, in some mysterious way, they continue to receive transcendent information and capabilities from some "external" source.

Table XXVI:
Reports of Paranormal Experiences Before and After the NDE
 (1 = United States 2 = Australia)

<u>Experience</u> ⁴²	<u>Percent General Population</u>	<u>Percent reporting Before NDE</u>	<u>Percent reporting After NDE</u>
Clairvoyance	38 ¹	43	73
Telepathy	58 ¹	46	87
Precognition	--	57	89
Supernatural rescue	--	38	78
Guidance	43 ²	37	92
Out-of-body experience	14 ¹	18	51
Spirits	27 ¹	24	68
Healing ability	--	8	70
Perception of auras	5 ¹	14	47
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Waking ESP experiences		24.6	55.1
Out-of-body experiences		11.6	43.5
Encounters with appar- itions		13.0	44.9
Perception of auras		11.6	33.3
Communication with the dead		11.6	27.5
Mystical experiences		23.2	59.4

As we can see from the table, one of the most frequently reported NDE after-effects is a greatly enhanced intuitive sensibility. For many this is described best as telepathy or extrasensory perception (ESP) and often takes the form of insights into other peoples' thoughts and feelings.⁴⁸ Obviously related to such "intuitive" sensibilities, the definitive post-NDE psychic, or spiritual phenomenon, is the awareness of an inner source of knowledge and wisdom, along with a corresponding sense of being guided, presumably by some benevolent force/being.⁴⁹ Many of Ring's NDErs also had more frequent "synchronistic occurrences" and experiences of being "rescued" from situations in which things were "going badly" and then something quite unexpected occurred to solve the problem.⁵⁰ One has to wonder how these people deal with such extraordinary personal changes.

For a few NDErs this involuntary acquisition of psychic/spiritual abilities does not affect them in a dramatic way at all, while for most it occurs so rapidly and in such a mysterious fashion that they have problems adjusting. For example, in the two years directly following her NDE, it was virtually impossible for one experient to deal with the bombardment of information she continuously obtained via clairvoyant, telepathic and precognitive experiences.⁵¹ Sutherland maintains that, generally, some psychic phenomena, like clairvoyance and precognition, seem to be "absorbed into daily life and accepted as 'normal'" whereas others, like OBEs and telepathy, demand the experient's attention because of their "disruptive nature".⁵² In some of her cases there were "extreme" reactions to this increase in "psychic

sensitivity", e.g., four of her NDErs became full-time healers, while four others struggled intensely to "suppress their psychic abilities" since they made them feel extremely uncomfortable.⁵³

Even though, on the whole, NDErs do tend to accept certain psychic phenomena as well as related spiritual phenomena (e.g. spiritual healing and spiritual guides), Ring found "no evidence...that NDErs show a general disposition to embrace occult concepts".⁵⁴ In reality, his NDErs' composite scores for his Psychic Experience Inventory revealed a neutral belief in reincarnation and demonic possession in comparison to a maximal positive belief in God and a slightly negative belief in astrology.⁵⁵ Also supporting this point is the fact that not a single paranormal phenomena was identified as the most significant NDE triggered change among Sutherland's experiencers.⁵⁶ NDErs eventually do accept these psychic/spiritual phenomena based on their "knowledge" of them (i.e. their first hand encounters with them during their NDEs) as apposed to a mere "belief" their existence.⁵⁷

So far we have seen that, following their perceived close brushes with death, NDEr and Non-NDErs are likely to experience a reorientation of values concerning self, living and death, with a focus on being more others-centred. For both, there is usually a concomitant intensity in the desire to lead a meaningful life, which is commonly associated with a revitalised sense of purpose. Combined with the NDE-unique after-effects - i.e., the loss of death anxiety and the certainty of life after physical death - these shared after-effect almost

always take on a much more intense quality for NDErs. It is quite typical then for these to find expression in the NDErs' quest to find the meaning of her/his very existence. Calling to mind the fact that most NDErs also experience an involuntary increase in psychic/spiritual phenomena following their NDEs, it is not difficult to understand why such a "response" to the NDE tends to take on a decidedly spiritual character.

4.0 Changes in Spirituality and Religiosity

It has been firmly established by the researchers that following their NDEs the majority of experiencers become substantially more "spiritual" compared to both 1) their own pre-NDE level of spirituality and 2) non-NDErs, even though there is typically no difference in pre-near-death event spirituality between these two groups.⁵⁸

On an individual level this lasting transformation⁵⁹ can be described as an "heightened inner religious feeling"⁶⁰; a bolstering of "faith".⁶¹ To a large extent this is grounded on an intensification of many experiencers' awareness of and relationship with a supreme being/power, known in monotheistic terms as "God".⁶² Hence, these experiencers report a corresponding increase in the certainty of God's existence and, even, more frequently, that they have a much better understanding of God's nature.⁶³ Usually this post-NDE deepening and personalising of the experiencer's relationship with this supreme being/force involves a significant increase in the frequency and intensity of "prayer", typically described in terms of a turning inward; a "meeting" with God within one's own self.⁶⁴ As was mentioned above,

this corresponds to a new, or renewed, conviction that God has a plan for one's life; that one's earthly existence has a definite, divinely authorised purpose.⁶⁵ This NDE-specific reorientation to, putting it yet another way, the Supreme Spiritual Reality is responsible for making the NDEr's spiritual quest so distinctive from the non-NDErs that many researchers consider it to be a unique NDE after-effect as well.⁶⁶ For example, another personal manifestation of this increased spirituality is the recognition, use, and development of God-given abilities, particularly for helping others. Such "gifts" may include the ability to understand previously confusing spiritual concepts⁶⁷, or the capacity to heal people.⁶⁸ Because of this, it is not uncommon for NDErs to conceptualize the pursuit of his/her purpose in life in terms of a spiritual/religious mission⁶⁹, which is guided by the reception of varying forms of overt spiritual assistance.⁷⁰

Although belief in the existence of heaven and hell remains relatively unaffected by having an NDE, experiencers are significantly more likely than non-NDErs to express a change in this area. This is almost always in a positive direction, i.e., an increased belief in heaven, a decreased belief in hell, or both. As is the case in relation to belief in "God", NDErs find that it is their pre-NDE *conceptuality* of "heaven" and "hell" which has been dramatically altered by their NDEs, rather than their pre-NDE belief or disbelief in their existence.⁷¹

It is probably because of such an experientially based, highly personalised post-NDE spirituality that, generally, NDErs tend to feel that they do not need

formal, institutionalised religious organisations⁷² in order to understand, develop, and express their spirituality.⁷³ In practical terms this means that some NDErs continue their pre-NDE involvement with such religious organisations, a minority seek such membership, while others leave them, finding their pre-NDE religious affiliations irrelevant or even detrimental to their spiritual growth.⁷⁴ As a whole, experiencers are much more tolerant of all forms of religious worship following their NDEs, some even to the point of believing that all religions are basically the same.⁷⁵ Grey, Sutherland, and Ring provide us with the most detailed information concerning NDErs' pre-NDE and post-NDE relationship to formal, institutionalised religion. We will now examine the relevant data from each of their studies in order to get a clearer picture of the effects having an NDE has on this aspect of a person's life.

"Quite a number" of Grey's NDErs became either "non-denominational" or joined "theosophical or psychical associations", since they felt that their previous religious affiliations were unable to supply them with the answers to the "questions" which they were "ardently seeking to understand."⁷⁶ In Table XXVII it can be seen that, of Grey's experiencers who were members of organised religions before their experiences, 44% (17/39) either left them completely or adopted "non-denomination philosophies" compared to 56% (22/39) who remained members, of which 18 (82%) actually reported having "more intense religious feelings". Overall 95% (39/41) of Grey's experiencers were associated with formal religious institutions before their NDEs compared to 68% (28/41)

afterwards, representing a net decrease of more than a quarter.

Table XXVII:
Religious Changes Arising from the NDE⁷⁷

<u>Religious Change</u>	<u>Protestant</u>	<u>Catholic</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
More intense religious feeling	7	9	2	0	16	44
Change to alternative beliefs	11	0	0	0	11	27
Nondenomi-national philosophies	3	2	1	2	8	19
No change	2	0	2	0	4	10
Total #	23	11	5	2	41	100%
%	55	27	12	5	100%	

At the most basic level, Sutherland's NDErs were significantly more likely to stop attending church services following their NDEs.⁷⁸ Before their NDEs 46% (23) of her experients claimed to have had no formal religious affiliation, compared to 84% (42) afterwards. This represents a net decrease of 38% (approximately 2 in every 5). Her experients' denominational affiliations before and after their NDEs are presented here in Table XXVIII.

Table XXVIII:
Religious Denomination Before and After an NDE⁷⁹

<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Percent General Population</u>	<u>Percent Sample (n=50) Before NDE</u>	<u>Percent Sample (n=50) After NDE</u>
No religion	6	46	84
Church of England	28	24	4
Roman Catholic	26	12	8
Methodist	4	4	0
Presbyterian	7	2	0
Jewish	<1	2	0
Baptist	2	2	0
Lutheran	1	2	0
Calvinist	No data	2	0
Brethren	No data	4	2
Buddhist	<1	0	2

Before their NDEs 60% of Sutherland's experiencers claimed to be neither "religious" nor "spiritual", while 24% were religious and 16% spiritual. Afterwards only 6% still maintained that they were religious in contrast to the four fold increase (i.e., 76%) in the group of those professing to be spiritual.⁸⁰ In even more general terms, Sutherland found that 36% (18) valued organised religion before their NDEs and only 20% (10) afterwards.⁸¹

In the most comprehensive and systematic treatment of the NDE after-effects to date Ring put to the test his hypothesis, based on his previous five years of NDE research, that the NDE is a "catalyst for a religious or spiritual awakening". He thus set out to investigate the "catalytic role of the NDE itself" concerning the full character or form of the NDEr's spiritual/religious development after his/her experience. Ring concluded that the NDE stimulates a quest for meaning and understanding, functioning as a catalyst of a spiritual awakening. He also posited that a "universalistically spiritual orientation" is the most likely "coherent world view" to characterise the experiencer's post-NDE spiritual development. The "essential elements" of this orientation are the following:

1. A tendency to characterise oneself as spiritual rather than religious per se.
2. A feeling of being inwardly close to God.
3. A deemphasis of the formal aspects of religious life and worship.
4. A conviction that there is life after death, regardless of religious belief.

5. An openness to the doctrine of reincarnation (and a general sympathy toward Eastern religions).

6. A belief in the essential underlying unity of all religions.

7. A desire for a universal religion embracing all humanity.⁸²

Ring bases his conclusion, as well as the support for these "elements", on both his Life Changes Questionnaire (LCQ)⁸³ and his Religious Beliefs Inventory (RBI)⁸⁴. These recorded the degree to which the subject's attitudes, interests, beliefs and behaviours had changed since his/her near-death episode or, for those who participated in the study simply as persons involved with NDEs, compared to themselves 10 years before. Only 26 of Ring's 76 NDErs completed the LCQ although all subjects in all the groups completed the RBI.⁸⁵

Of Ring's 76 NDErs 42 (55%) identified themselves as currently (post-NDE) being "mainline Christians"⁸⁶ and 34 (45%) as either belonging to some other religious organisation or not religiously affiliated - these he referred to as "all others". Thirty "near-death survivors" who did not have an NDE (i.e. non-NDErs) and 66 persons who had never been close to death but were knowledgeable about and interested in the NDE⁸⁷ also completed the LCQ and the RBI.⁸⁸ After assessing the responses of all these participants Ring found that "all groups" - the NDErs, non-NDErs, and NDE interested persons - demonstrated a "shift toward spiritual universalism" following their NDEs, following their near-

death episodes, and compared to 10 years earlier respectively. In fact, concerning overall scores, mainline Christians who were non-NDErs scored higher on the spiritual universalism scale than mainline Christians who were NDErs, while the mainline Christians that were simply interested in and knowledgeable about NDEs scored only slightly below the mainline Christian NDErs. Given these details Ring recognized that it was "chiefly" NDErs who were not mainline Christians that, by far, showed the "strongest universalistically spiritual leanings."⁸⁹ Although, from a perspective of extreme change 49% of all NDErs, 30% of non-NDErs, and 15% of NDE involved persons showed a "strong" shift towards spiritual universalism. It is the finding that these "extreme" results represent an overall "highly significant" statistical difference between the three groups⁹⁰ which provides the most support for Ring's conclusions.

Highlighting the specific findings associated with Ring's "seven essential elements" it can be said first, without equivocation, that compared to before their NDEs experiences do indeed report a strong feeling of God's presence deep within themselves, leading to a marked increase in prayerfulness and attentiveness to spiritual matters. Yet there seems to be an unpredictable corresponding change in the NDErs' interest in organised religion, i.e. 42% (11) reported either an increased or strongly increased interest in organised religion, 31% (8) a decreased or strongly decreased interest, and 27% (7) felt that there had been no change.⁹¹

Ring also asserts that NDErs tend to "de-emphasise the formal aspects of religion" compared to persons who have never been close to death, and that even though many of his NDErs continued to "attend religious services"

they generally felt that their "spirituality" was "independent of and unrelated to the practice of institutionalised religion".⁹² These views are based on three items from the RBI - (2, 3, and 4 in the table below) - yet the information itself does not appear to support Ring's statements in a manner which is altogether convincing.

Table XXIX:
Percentage Agreement with
Universalistically Spiritual Orientation⁹³

<u>RBI Statement</u>	NDers (others) (n=34)	NDers (all) (n=76)	NDers (Christians) (n=42)	Non-NDer (n=30)
1. More and more I feel at home in any church.	38.2	43.4	47.6	20.0
2. Private prayer is more important in the religious life of a person than is attendance at public church services.	85.3	77.6	71.4	70.0
3. It is important to attend church regularly.	67.7	55.3	45.2	56.7
4. In order to live a truly religious life, the Church or some other organised religious body is essential.	85.3	71.1	59.5	73.3
5. No matter what your religious beliefs, there is life after death.	91.2	85.5	81.0	53.3
6. Eternal life is a gift of God only to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.	79.4	65.8	55.7	66.7
7. The essential core of all religions is the same.	85.3	71.1	59.5	40.0
8. A universal religion embracing all humanity is an idea that strongly appeals to me.	79.4	68.4	59.5	46.7

In regard to Ring's statement that many NDErs feel that "their spirituality is independent of and unrelated to the practice of institutionalised religion" it should be pointed out that, following their near-death episodes, 45% of all NDErs and 55% of the mainline Christian NDErs, reported a tendency to agree that it is important to attend church regularly in comparison to 43% of the non-NDErs.⁹⁴ In the same context a third of all NDErs, and well over a third of all mainline Christian NDErs, said that compared to their positions before their near-death episodes they tended to agree with the statement that the Church or some other organised religious body is "essential" for living a "truly religious life". This is in contrast to the non-NDErs, since only 26% reported that following their near-death episodes they tended to agree that organised religious bodies are essential for living a religious life. It can also be observed that there is little difference in emphasis on private prayer being more important than church attendance between NDErs and non-NDErs (78% compared to 70% respectively). Given these details we see that non-NDErs actually de-emphasise church attendance and the necessity of organised religion in living a religious life more than NDErs do. Therefore, Ring's data relating to the effect that a close brush with death has on one's attitude towards "formalised religion" suggests that non-NDErs are actually more likely to shift towards a spiritual universalism than NDErs.

As was already shown above, it is a well known fact among NDE researchers that following their experiences

NDErs are much more likely to believe in a positive afterlife. Ring takes this a step further, claiming that collectively his NDErs' position on who "qualifies" for life after death is represented in the statement that "no one is excluded and particular religious beliefs are irrelevant".⁹⁵ This is based on two items from the RBI (items 5 and 6 above), which show that, following their close brushes with death, 86% of all NDErs were more inclined to agree with the statement, "No matter what your religious beliefs, there is life after death", compared to 81% of mainline Christian NDErs, 53% of non-NDErs (of which 43% were Christian), and 62% of NDE involved persons (of which 44% were Christian).⁹⁶ Surprisingly more than half (56%) of mainline Christian NDErs said that, compared to their pre-NDE positions, they were more inclined to disagree with the statement, "Eternal life is a gift of God only to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord". Although, in comparison, non-NDErs were still more inclined to disagree with this statement than the Christian NDErs and NDErs as a whole.⁹⁷

As for the relationship between NDErs and the belief in reincarnation, Ring relates that 65% (17) of his NDErs expressed an increased openness to reincarnation, 23% (6) were unchanged and 12% (3) communicated a decrease in openness to reincarnation. The overall "average level of present belief" for the NDErs was only .32 on a scale from +2.00 (complete acceptance) to -2.00 (complete rejection). What is probably most interesting here is that, from his many years of NDE research, Ring surmises that it is not the NDE itself which leads some NDErs to be more open to reincarnation but a "response" to their

reading and other "life experiences following" their NDEs. He adds that a "substantial" number of experiencers do not tend to believe in reincarnation and that "some quite emphatically disbelieve it."⁹⁸

The only real data Ring offers to support his parenthetical statement that experiencers express a "general sympathy toward Eastern religions" following their NDEs come from two brief quotes, each from a different NDEr. His strongest argument for this point relies on his assertion that "Eastern Religions...are known for their openness to and tolerance for various forms of religious expression" and their incorporation of the "essence of other religious traditions into their own framework." Reasoning from these ideas Ring insinuates that the NDEr's post-NDE spiritual orientation would probably lead him/her to also embrace such a religious perspective.⁹⁹

The most convincing evidence, according to Ring, for the NDE effecting a universalistically spiritual orientation is that NDErs 1) believe that there is an "underlying unity of all religions" and 2) express a desire for a "universal religious faith that will transcend the historical divisiveness of the world's great religions".¹⁰⁰ RBI items 7 and 8 above are given as the empirical indicators for these assertions. It is clearly evident that NDErs do, in fact, score nearly twice as high as both the other groups (who did not have NDEs) concerning a change of belief in a common core to all religions. Focusing on the mainline Christian NDErs it can be seen that 3 out of every 5 (i.e. 60%) said that, compared to their pre-NDE position, they were more inclined to agree with the ideas that 1) the "core of all

religions" is essentially the same and 2) that a "universal religion embracing all humanity" is a "strongly" appealing idea.¹⁰¹

It would seem, in the light of Ring's data, that even though NDErs do report a post-NDE deemphasis of formal, organised religion, those who have a close brush with death but no NDE (i.e. non-NDErs) are actually more likely to experience this change. Only in one area do NDErs (i.e., the group consisting of both Christian and non-Christian NDErs) score higher in changed attitudes towards formal religion than non-NDErs, what Ring interprets as "increased religious tolerance". Although, it is non-Christian NDErs who, by far, tend to express a new-found attitude of spiritual universalism compared to Christian NDErs, non-NDErs, and NDE interested persons. At the end of his presentation of this data Ring does - as we have seen that he should - qualify his conclusion, commenting that there are "certainly many NDErs" where this "universalistically spiritual orientation" is "weak or altogether lacking", yet, at the same time he insists that this orientation is always "unmistakably there as a tendency, as a potentiality seeking to manifest itself".¹⁰²

In another, more recent study conducted by Ring and a colleague, Christopher Rosing, the LCQ and RBI were administered to a completely different group of NDErs and non-NDErs. Their results throw a bit more light on the subject of phenomena which are directly related to having an NDE in contrast to simply coming close to death or being interested and involved with NDEs in some way. At the end of this study it was determined that NDEs 1) have a "negligible effect on religiousness", and 2) produce

strongly "perceived increases in spirituality". Concerning the NDE after-effects as a whole, Ring and Rosing reached almost the same conclusion as the one Ring arrived at six years earlier: there is a "highly significant shift" towards "universal spiritual values as opposed to sectarian religious ones." What is probably the most important aspect of this study, in the context of this chapter, is that both the 74 NDErs and the 54 persons who had never had an NDE (but were simply interested and knowledgeable about NDEs) produced LCQ and RBI scores that showed a significant shift towards universalistic spiritual values. There was no statistically significant difference between these two groups.¹⁰³ Ring and Rosing also found this to be surprising, and suggested that "whereas having NDEs may promote the kind of value shifts the LCQ and RBI disclose, merely becoming interested in these (NDE) phenomena may also accomplish the same end."¹⁰⁴

Cardiologist Michael Sabom's results confirmed that NDEs tend to have no predictable effect on religious affiliation, yet a highly predictable increase in inner, spiritual orientation. For most of his NDErs there was 1) a strengthening of previous religious views, 2) no change in previous religious affiliation, and 3) a "marked increase in formal religious activity or personal commitment".¹⁰⁵ Moody too had reported that a "few" NDErs who had been "exposed to religious doctrines" but rejected them "earlier in life", found that they "acquired religious feelings with new depth" after their NDEs.¹⁰⁶

Summary

Following an NDE the vast majority of persons are significantly more likely than non-NDErs to experience an increase in inner spiritual awareness. For most of these there is a feeling of having a direct and personal relationship with God, which corresponds with a newly transformed, experientially based, understanding of God's nature. This, in turn, tends to manifest itself in highly significant increase in the frequency with which these NDErs "pray". It is also common for experiencers to report a new-found conviction that their lives have a divinely ordained purpose, for which, in some cases, their new, or rediscovered, gifts and talents are uniquely given to pursue. The subsequent use and development of these, typically in some kind of service to others, goes hand in hand with many NDEr's quest for spiritual understanding and integration.

In terms of the NDEr's attitudes and participation concerning formal, organised religion it is apparent that, across the board, *there is no predictable change in interest and affiliation.*¹⁰⁷ Generally though, there is a feeling among many NDErs that their deeply personal spirituality does not require the mediation of, and/or interpretation by, any one religious tradition. As for the outward expression of their increased spirituality, it does not appear that organised religion itself is customarily thought of as undesirable. Yet for some NDErs particular religious denominations, which are strongly sectarian, are perceived as being too narrow minded and thus unhelpful, irrelevant, or even

detrimental to their spiritual growth. There is, though, a tendency for NDErs to de-emphasise the formal aspects of religion, however, in one of the most extensive studies investigating such NDE after-effects, non-NDErs actually expressed this attitude more frequently than NDErs.

In the only study which offered detailed information on those who identified themselves as Christian NDErs per se, it was found that non-Christian NDErs were almost twice as likely to embrace a universal spiritual orientation to the world than both Christian NDErs and non-NDErs. Significantly, non-NDE Christians were actually found to be more likely to make this shift than Christian NDErs. On what many would see as the most "Christian" statement presented to one study population slightly more than half of the Christian NDErs reported that in comparison to their positions before their NDEs they were now more inclined to disagree with the statement that Eternal life is available only to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, in comparison to two-thirds of non-NDErs (of which 43% were Christians) and only one-third of NDE interested persons (of which 44% were Christians).

5.0 Negative NDEs

From the limited information available it appears that the after-effects of a negative NDE include an increased belief in 1) life after death, 2) God or a supreme being, 3) heaven and hell (an afterlife), and 4) that an evil force exists.¹⁰⁸ In contrast to these "chosen" after-effects negative NDErs, like positive

NDErs, also report spontaneous post-NDE phenomena, or "given" after-effects, which seem to be grounded in the same reality as the positive NDEr's psychic/spiritual awareness and experiences. For instance, one researcher who spent 15 years gathering information on negative NDEs, eventually amassing 105 accounts, made some startling discoveries:

(Commonly reported were)...haunting(s) once the individual revived. Examples of this are the numerous reports of a "devil" who physically manifests in broad daylight for the purpose of chasing the experiencer, supposedly to capture his or her soul, or to win the "battle". The manifestation of other threatening beings or creatures has also been claimed....Sometimes fearful scenes and sensations reoccur afterward, as when an experiencer is unexpectedly faced with the onslaught of some perceived cyclone, whirlpool, tidal wave, or perhaps an unchecked fall into a void.¹⁰⁹

This researcher also found that various NDE phenomenon which, following the NDE itself, were considered extremely positive by some experiencers were perceived to be very negative by others and vice versa, e.g., "Here were two people: one traumatised by a heaven-like experience, the other uplifted and transformed by a hellish one."¹¹⁰ By more careful questioning of the NDErs and those close to them this researcher reached the conclusion that no matter what kind of NDE one may experience it represented a "growth event that allows for a 'course correction'", enabling the individual involved to focus on whatever is weak or missing in his/her character development".¹¹¹

Of particular theological interest is the observation that many people who have had hellish NDEs

feel "betrayed by religion" for stressing the heavenly aspects of religion and not informing people strongly enough that there is a hell and that people go there.¹¹² It was also discovered in another study that unlike positive NDEs negative NDEs invariably "tend to convert the experient to a strict Bible-based Christianity."¹¹³ It seems possible that negative NDEs are not reported more frequently because such experients feel too "ashamed or fearful or angry to talk about it" and/or they do not want to hear other peoples' criticism and judgement of them in the light of their negative otherworldly experience.¹¹⁴

6.0 NDE After-effects: Challenges

That the NDE is an ineffable event has been confirmed time and time again, from the very beginning of modern NDE research. It is the NDE's character as a phenomenon that transcends, or even contradicts, various aspects of most peoples' everyday conceptuality of reality that has created very real problems for many NDErs. Quite often when an NDEr attempts to share his/her experience with another person the experient is simply not taken seriously, told his/her experience was not real, and/or scoffed at. Hence there is a subsequent fear of ridicule which in many cases greatly inhibits NDErs' communication about their experiences.¹¹⁵ This has obvious, negative implications for the expression and development of the diverse NDE after-effects as described above.

It should be mentioned here as well, that the experient's post-NDE enthusiasm for living can be delayed

for varying periods of time, since the profound feelings of peace, love and painlessness experienced during the NDE are often contrasted by the experient's physical, earthly existence.¹¹⁶ Not all NDErs experience this return in a disappointing way, and many who do quickly make the readjustment. Becoming reintegrated into one's pre-NDE existence can be extremely difficult, since NDErs' values, beliefs, and priorities usually become so altered that, in a sense, they are not the same people they were before their experiences.¹¹⁷ In one study it was actually claimed that full reintegration can take up to seven years for some NDErs.¹¹⁸

7.0 Analysis

"In virtually every case the people who have the experience become convinced on the basis of this experience that there is indeed a life after death. Moreover there is a tendency to see such a life, not as a hope, but as a certainty."¹¹⁹

Here, summing up his own investigation of the NDE after-effects, Badham locates the "final evidential feature of the near-death experience"¹²⁰ concerning the existence of the Cartesian soul/mind, and thus, the real possibility of a person's literal survival of physical death. Even if we were also prepared to make such a claim, based on the research data we have reviewed above, we would still have to wait until we completed our investigation of the causes, or "triggers", of the NDE in the next chapter before making a final determination of whether or not the NDE should be par/eschatologically contextualized. Let this not be a discouragement though, as the after-effects themselves do indeed offer us a number of important and relevant clues concerning our investigation of the NDE's significance.

Back in chapter one we anticipated the importance of this analysis by describing these after-effects, in relation to the NDE content, as being part of the "far more empirically analysable NDE context". Precisely because their existence and nature is open to "public" scrutiny, the researchers have been able to confirm the veracity of the self-reported NDE after-effect as well as their longevity. In certain respects such a high level of certainty comes not only from communications with people intimately familiar with experiencers both before

and after their NDEs, but also by observing the all-to-apparent struggle which experiencers invariably go through in their attempts to become reintegrated into their pre-NDE lives. As we have seen in many places above, regardless of their "empirical" nature, not all of the after-effects associated with having an NDE are so clearly defined and/or easily predicted. The ambiguous nature of the NDE after-effects was brought out most clearly in two ways: 1) those who had a close brush with physical death, yet did not report an NDE (non-NDEs), described experiencing many of the same post-event changes in their attitudes towards self, life, and others as did NDEs, and 2) the post-event *changes* in the individual NDEs' relationship to formal, institutionalised religion ranged from extremely positive to extremely negative. How are we to arrive at some kind of conclusion regarding the NDE "context" and whether or not it supports a par/eschatological interpretative framework given this degree of ambiguity? It is believed that our previous reflections on the ontological significance of the NDE content will help us to see the apparently indeterminate nature of the NDE after-effects, not so much in terms of a problem but as further indications of the proper context for pursuing a valid interpretation of the NDE.

Let us begin by recalling those relatively predictable after-effects which non-NDEs and NDEs share: 1) an increased appreciation of life, 2) a renewed sense of purpose, 3) being a stronger person, and 4) being a more loving, caring person. Since the non-NDEs reporting these changes also reported that they did not have any conscious experiences during their time of

physical unconsciousness (i.e., they apparently did not have an experience even similar to an NDE), it would not be unreasonable to assert that these are the results of conceptual changes which these non-NDErs consciously chose to make. It would also seem obvious that such choices were made after the non-NDErs' close brushes with physical death. Therefore, we might even take one step further, asserting that there is evidently a direct correlation between the belief that one was near to death and such generalised, life-affirming attitudes. Looking over now at our cowering group of NDErs - who also reported having a close brush with physical death - is it really necessary for us to possess a highly homogeneous after-effects master list, representing the details of each persons' changed, life-affirming attitudes, in order for each person to keep his/her "I'm an NDEr and proud of it" badge? "Well, they are supposed to be different aren't they?" someone might say. We would have to agree. The real question here is, How different do these particular after-effects have to be in order to be NDE-specific? In a number of ways it was stressed above that there does exist, what the researchers identified as, a significant qualitative difference between NDErs and non-NDErs in this area. In our ultimate assessment of the facts that 1) many of the *specific manifestations* of life-affirming changes following a real or supposed close brush with death are not exactly the same from NDEr to NDEr, and 2) that non-NDErs report quantitatively similar, though qualitatively different, life-affirming attitudes we will probably find that it is the individual's own conscious, conceptually based decision-making process which plays the major role here. Yet,

there has to be more to it than personal subjectivity if we are going to account for even the qualitative differences between these groups.

We saw above that such positive personality and value changes are NDE-unique in terms of a deeper integration of the changes on a "spiritual" level for experiencers. This is an important, if not crucial, factor in the decidedly hyperbolic descriptions of the NDE after-effects which have become so popularised. A few examples of the language that we used above in the first section will serve as adequate reminders. Thus, NDEers reported a new-found vitality and enthusiasm for living life to the fullest, which was primarily understood to mean being more loving and helping others. There is a self-acceptance and self-confidence which coincides with the belief that one is unique and living with a specific purpose to fulfil. Quite often NDEers believe that this has been given to them by "God", i.e., the supreme being/force in the universe. NDEers often (re)discover personal talents and abilities, which are commonly understood to be pursued and developed for both the benefit of others and their own "inner" growth. The concept of a *personal quest to find the meaning of one's very existence* seemed to encapsulate many of these, so-called, spiritually-integrated changes. However, many want to know why NDEs do not have a predictable effect, then, on a person's relationship to formal, institutional religion? How can we reconcile the facts that some NDEers reject all such previous religious affiliations while others get deeply involved in them for the first time in their lives? Is it not reasonable to expect that the invariant NDE content would cause the same effects in

individual's lives, especially concerning what seems to be the highly synonymous nature of the transcendent NDE types and religion's transcendent nature? These questions about the vagueness of the NDE after-effects in terms of religion can only be addressed if we return to the first point we made in this paragraph: the NDE-specific nature of the life-affirming personality and value changes is largely a matter of their integration on a spiritual level. Thus, as we shall see even more clearly below, like the other chosen personality and values changes, the experient's post-event changes in religiosity can only be NDE-specific in terms of how they fit into, or relate to, the experient's overall spirituality. None of these, and other, chosen NDE after-effects can be separated from the researcher-based declaration that experiencers, unambiguously, become much more spiritual following their NDEs. This is a given. In other words, it seems highly probable that the unambiguously given post-NDE phenomena are, primarily, that which makes accurately identifying and understanding the unique effects NDEs have on experiencers possible.

According to the data there are a number of these NDE after-effects which are "given", after-effects which are reportedly initiated by no conscious act of the NDEr him/herself. One of these is a marked increase in inner, spiritual awareness, indisputably found to be at the root of most experiencers' decisions concerning their religious attitudes and how these are expressed. As we saw above, this tended to find consistent expression in terms of the experiencers' awareness of "God's" enabling presence, which commonly was intensified and utilised by a focusing of one's attention "inward". It is also interesting to

recall that NDErs did not necessarily report a new-found belief in "God's" existence, but an increase in the level of their certainty on this question along with a deepened understanding of this supreme being/force's nature. Since the NDE inspired increase in spirituality does not always take the form of an outwardly demonstrated commitment in the context of a traditional, organised religion, it seems rather fitting that many researchers have found the concept of a "spiritual awakening" to be more appropriately descriptive of the NDE after-effects as a whole than a religious transformation per se.¹²¹

The most detailed investigation of this aspect of the NDE after-effects - Ring's investigation of his theory that the NDEs cause a shift towards a "universalistically spiritual orientation" - has clearly shown us that the chosen NDE after-effects having to do with religiosity are extremely ambiguous, in terms of 1) their predictability among NDErs and 2) being shared with non-NDErs. Everyone of the researchers who even touched upon these issues found that the only predicable NDE-specific after-effects relating to the outward expressions of one's inner spiritual being (i.e. "religion") were those which are indistinguishable from the given post-NDE psychic/spiritual phenomena. We should also recall Ring's findings, that in many respects non-NDErs, and sometimes even NDE-interested-people, reported a more significant change in their religious orientations than NDErs.

Although the manifestations of the given NDE after-effects are no doubt influenced by the experient's personality, their unique qualities leave the experient with little room for attributing them to any of his/her

pre-NDE personal capacities. That which take place by no conscious act of the NDEr him/herself also seems to take place in way which, like the NDE event itself, can not be ignored. What kind of person could ignore the sudden experience of such things as clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, supernatural rescue, out-of-body-experiences, healing abilities, and the perception of auras? Even the most common, comparatively mundane, given NDE after-effect of a greatly enhanced intuitive sensibility could hardly be accepted as a "normal" event in one's life. These are unarguably special; none of these are either shared with non-NDErs or unclear in their manifestations. The only thing ambiguous about these NDE after-effects is the experient's own lack of understanding as to how to cope with them. If anything can these phenomena offer us hard "evidence" concerning the NDE's post-event context. Therefore, this might be a good point at which to ask ourselves the substantive question: to what extent do these NDE after-effects - the only NDE after-effects which are practically "objective" - suggest a par/eschatological contextualisation of the NDE? Or, to put it in a way posed in the last chapter, Can these after-effects provide us with incontestable evidence that NDErs actually did suffer physical death, or at least, literally experienced the first few moments of being dead? One would be hard-pressed to cite these as supporting an affirmative answer to this question, even if it were rephrased such that experiences "analogous" to *actual, physical* death were considered.¹²² What they "suggest" is not a justification for a par/eschatological interpretation of the NDE, but something far more basic, that the *experient's very being* has either been altered

by the NDE or that, somehow, it continues to be profoundly effected by phenomena very similar to those encountered during the NDE event.

Is it going too far to associate these NDE given after-effects with the ontological question, What is a person? Let us suppose that we have just met an individual who began telling us how he/she had all-of-a-sudden, through no effort on his/her part, acquired apparently transcendent abilities such as "reading other people's minds"; and/or knowing of events which were taking place, at the time at which they were happening, yet without being physically present; and/or being able to mysteriously "heal" other people? Would we not, deep down inside ourselves, ask, "Who does he think he's fooling, people can't really do such things", or at least, "What kind of person is this?" Even if we were quite open-minded about such things, our reaction would be, like the highly sceptical, grounded on the challenge which such an individual makes to our "normal", "enlightened" understanding of what human beings are. Indeed, the research has confirmed that NDErs quickly learn to keep their experiences to themselves, as the typical reaction from others is characterised by disbelief in such transcendent notions of personhood. Not only this, but we should remember that it is not uncommon for it to take years for an NDEr to become reoriented into the context of their pre-NDE lives. Again, could it be because their very being has been changed? It looks plain that if we want to possess a satisfying understanding of the NDE we will need to explore the ontological meaning of the NDE after-effects.

Above we have seen that one of the advantages of such an ontological approach is that it helps us to understand the presence of the shared after-effects among NDErs and non-NDErs, while allowing for their distinctive qualitative differences. Both NDErs' and non-NDErs' reflections on simply coming close to death have been shown to lead to positive life-affirming changes. Combined with their memories of the NDE itself and the coincident, yet unsolicited, effects to their very being, such changes would have to take on a decidedly unique character for NDErs. And, as the given effects on the experient's being would be so fundamental (i.e. ontological in nature), as we would expect, they are described in a relatively unambiguous way by all NDErs.

Are we suggesting, though, that every unambiguous NDE-specific after-effect has to be purely "given"? As we will see below, this does not always seem to be the case. Many would say that there are two NDE-specific, chosen, yet unambiguous, after-effects which are obviously NDE-content specific and, therefore, not based on the given after-effects. It is indeed reasonable to posit that the NDEr's memories of particular aspects of the phenomena experienced during his/her NDE could be a significant factor influencing post-NDE conceptual changes which are neither shared with non-NDErs nor unpredictable in their quantitative and qualitative expression among NDErs themselves. Could it be that these chosen NDE-specific after-effects are unambiguous because they are actually founded on phenomena which, ultimately, cannot be distinguished from the post-NDE given after-effects?

In seeking an answer to this question we will start by recalling a more practical question posed at the beginning of our analysis, i.e., How different do the shared after-effects have to be in order to be identified as NDE-specific? Could our answer to this question now be that the less par/eschatological and the more ontological significant a post-event change is the more NDE-specific, or NDE-unique, it will be? For instance, are not the foundational and NDE-specific after-effects of a greatly enhanced intuitive sensibility and general "spiritual" reorientation of one's life reasonable ways of expressing a change in one's very being and not just a revised, experientially based, understanding of life after death? If this assessment is true, we should be able to better understand the unambiguous NDE-unique chosen after-effects. In fact, it is these two which many have assumed suggest an unequivocal contextualization of the NDE in eschatological terms, i.e., a significant 1) decrease in death anxiety, and 2) increase in the belief in life after death.

Undoubtedly the judgement that the primary significance of the experient's decreased death anxiety and increased belief in life after death is eschatological is based on the assumption that it is the NDEr's own experience of existing in a disembodied state which has led him/her to hold such convictions. In the first place, that these "convictions" are based purely on the experient's conscious decision-making process is questionable. The data does reveal the importance of the experient's conceptual changes in this area, but it was also maintained that at the root of this was the

experient's inability to reconcile his/her previous conceptions of these with the NDE experience. How logical would it be to attribute such unambiguous, consistently reported changes primarily to rationalised choices in terms of a phenomenon, which we have seen, is definitively ineffable? This point becomes clear when one tries to explain how merely a decision to change one's notion of death would be able to significantly reduce, if not eliminate, one's death anxiety in a way that is, reportedly, permanent. Secondly, even if these two after-effects are highly influenced by the experient's NDE experiences and perceptions which he/she interprets in eschatological terms, the assumption that such an par/eschatological context is the appropriate context for interpreting such experiences and perceptions is itself questionable. This has been shown already in our analysis of the NDE content. We might also point out that such apparently eschatologically grounded convictions need not be based on an experience of existing in a disembodied state while the physical body is putatively dying/dead. Similar changes in one's attitudes towards death and the possibility of life after death can be facilitated by religious conversion, philosophical enlightenment, experiences of paranormal phenomena such as apparitions, etc.

In terms of those after-effects which are unquestionably a matter of choice (i.e., those shared by non-NDErs and NDErs) the research has shown that the more these chosen after-effects are related to the given after-effects the less ambiguous and the more NDE-specific they become. It would seem to be just as fitting a judgement of the decreased death anxiety and

increased belief in life after death to say that they are primarily ontologically based. In other words, they are grounded on the NDEr's intuitive understanding that, as in the NDE itself, his/her real self is the essential self, the being of which seems to transcend the categories of physical existence and, therefore, physical death. The given, typically transcendent, after-effects would certainly reinforce such an understanding of self and, thus, such a perspective on the survival of physical death. The relevance of the increased belief in life after death to such an understanding of one's personal identity is therefore evident. Combined with the experient's perceptions of the essential's self's ability to transcend the material world such a "belief" would no doubt be strengthened. One must admit that these chosen, yet unambiguous and NDE-specific, after-effects are indeed eschatologically relevant. However, as we have seen up to this point in our investigation, there is still no justification for choosing this, over an ontological, as the primary context in which the true significance of the NDE is to be located.

ENDNOTES

¹ These studies include: 1) Bauer, M. (1985) Near-death experiences and attitude change. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 5, 39-47; 2) Gallup, G.Jr., with Proctor, W. (1983) *Adventures in immortality: a look beyond the threshold of death*. Souvenir, London; 3) Green, T. J., and Friedman, P. (1983) Near-death experiences in a southern california population. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3, 77-96; 4) Grey, M. (1985) *Return from death*. Arkana (Routledge and Kegan Paul), London; 5) Greyson, B., and Stevenson, I. (1980) The phenomenology of near-death experiences. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 137 (10), 1193-1196; 6) Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975) *Life after life*. Mockingbird Books, New York; 7) Ring, K. (1980) *Life at death a scientific investigation of the near-death experience*. Coward, McCann and Georghagan, New York; 8) Ring, K. (1984) *Heading towards omega: in search of the meaning of the near-death experience*. William Morrow, New York; 9) Ring, K., and Rosing, C.J. (1990) The omega project: an empirical study of the NDE prone personality. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 8 (4), 211-239; 10) Sabom, M. (1982) *Recollections of death: a medical investigation*. Corgi Books, Transworld Publishers LTD, London; 11) Sutherland, C. (1989) Psychic phenomenon following near-death experiences: an Australian study. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 8 (2), 93-102; and 12) Sutherland, C. (1990) Changes in religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices following near-death experiences: an Australian study. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 9 (1), 21-31.

² Ring, 1980, 139-141.

³ Moody, R.A., Jr. (1988) *The light beyond*. Random House, New York, 27.

⁴ Bauer, 44-46; Grey, 95; Ring and Rosing, 234; Gallup, 133; Greyson and Stevenson, 1195, Green, 93.

⁵ The terms "given" and "chosen" NDE after-effects are my own.

⁶ Ring, 1980, 138-158.

⁷ Grey, 96, 101; Ring and Rosing, 227-228; and Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.

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- ⁸ See, Ring, 1980, 157-158; Ring, 1984, 139-141; Grey, 99; Gallup, 130; Moody, 1975, 92; Green, 93; Ring and Rosing, 228; and Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ⁹ See, Greyson and Stevenson, 1195; Grey, 96-101; Ring, 1980, 157-158; Ring, 1984, 133-134, 141; Ring and Rosing, 228; and Green, 93.
- ¹⁰ In fact, Ring devised and administered the Life Changes Questionnaire (LCQ), which directly addressed this aspect of the NDE after-effects. He found that on all the items of the LCQ NDErs reported a strong increase since their NDEs. The categories included: Helping others, Compassion for others, Tolerance for others, Love for others, Insight into others, Understanding of others, and Acceptance of others. (Ring, 1984, 310-304).
- ¹¹ Ring, 1984, 102; Grey, 96, 101; Ring, 1980, 157-158; Ring and Rosing, 227-228; and Gallup, 133.
- ¹² Ring, 1984, 134, 141; and Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ¹³ Moody, 1975, 93; Ring, 1980, 157-158; Grey, 101; and Gallup, 129-132.
- ¹⁴ Moody, 1975, 93-94; and Grey, 99.
- ¹⁵ Ring, 1984, 120; and Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.
- ¹⁶ Sabom, 172 (*Italic mine*).
- ¹⁷ See Ring, 1984, 139; Moody, 1975, 89; and Grey, 95.
- ¹⁸ Moody, 1975, 98, see also 93.
- ¹⁹ See Ring, 1980, 68; Gallup, 109; and Moody, 1975, 78.
- ²⁰ Grey, 99-101. See also, Ring and Rosing, 229-231; Gallup, 129; Moody, 1975, 79-80, 94; Green, 93; and Bauer, 41-43.
- ²¹ Grey, 99-100 (*Italic mine*).
- ²² Ibid; Ring and Rosing 229-231; and Moody, 1975, 92-93.
- ²³ Ring, 1984, 134. See also, Moody, 1975, 89, 93; Grey, 96-98; Greyson and Stevenson, 1195; Ring and Rosing, 228; and Sutherland, 1990, 28.
- ²⁴ Ring, 1984, 134.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Gallup, 130; Sabom, 183; and Ring, 1984, 136. For example, in terms of career changes Sabom found that two of his NDErs left their former employment to become volunteer hospital workers (Sabom, 180-183); Gallup writes of a woman who became a nurse because of her NDE (Gallup, 130); and Sutherland tells us that a school librarian, an office worker, and two housewives became (full-time) "healers" (Sutherland, 1989, 101).

²⁷ Ring, 1984, 134-139. See also Sutherland, 1990, 26. Sutherland found that there was a highly significant change in the "quest (for) spiritual values" for experiencers after their NDEs compared to before their NDEs. (Ibid, 26).

²⁸ Ring and Rosing, 229-231.

²⁹ Ring, 1984, 134-139.

³⁰ See, Moody, 1975, 94-98; Green, 93; Ring, 1980, 175-182; Bauer, 41-43; Gallup, 123-126; Sutherland, 1990, 26-29; Sabom, 88-89, 285; Grey, 101-107; and Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.

³¹ See Ring, 1980, 178; Ring 1984, 20, 85; Sabom, 125; and Grey, 103.

³² See Green, 93; Moody, 1975, 94-98; Gallup, 125; Ring, 1980, 174-185; Sabom, 172-173; and Grey, 104-105, 107-108.

³³ Moody, 1975, 96-97.

³⁴ Ibid, 96-98.

³⁵ Gallup, 125. Also see Sabom, 145; and Grey, 101.

³⁶ Moody, 1975, 94-97; Green, 93; Ring, 1980, 182; Sabom, 172-173; and Grey, 101-106.

³⁷ Gallup, 126; Grey, 104-105; Sabom, 126; and Moody, 1975, 94.

³⁸ See Sabom, 174; Greyson and Stevenson, 1195; Moody, 1975, 94, 143-144; Ring, 1980, 260-261; and Sutherland, 1990, 30. Three other important articles on this subject have been published by Dr. Bruce Greyson: Greyson, B. (1981) Near-Death experiences and attempted suicide.

Suicide and Life Threatening Behaviour, 11, 10-16; and Greyson, B. (1986) Incidence of Near-death experiences following attempted suicide. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behaviour*, 16, 40-45. In 1983 Greyson published findings which showed that persons who had attempted suicide (experiencing a close brush with death) had an ensuing risk of 50 to 100 times greater probability of actually succeeding in another suicide attempt. Although, when the suicide attempt was followed by a (transcendent) NDE the risk was reduced markedly. (Greyson, B. (1983) Near-death experiences and personal values. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 140, 618-620).

³⁹ Ring, 1980, 168-169; Sutherland, 1990, 26, 29; Sabom, 88-89, 285; Grey, 105-108; Ring, 1984, 156-157, 316-317; Greyson and Stevenson, 1196; Moody, 1975, 96; and Green, 93.

⁴⁰ Sutherland, 1990, 26.

⁴¹ Grey, 105-106; Ring, 1980, 169; and Sutherland, 1990, 29.

⁴² Ring, 1984, 173-192; Ring and Rosing, 223-224; Sutherland, 1989, 96-101; Grey, 100; and Moody, 1975, 91.

⁴³ See Sutherland 1989, 99, 101; Ring 1984, 171-172; Grey, 100-101; Greyson, B. (1983) Increase in psychic and psi-related phenomena following near-death experiences. *Theta* 11, 26-29; and Greyson and Stevenson, 1196. Greyson and Stevenson state that before having their NDEs their experiencers, in fact, reported less incidents of extrasensory phenomena than the general public, or "identified psychiatric patients" (Ibid, 1196).

⁴⁴ Ring, 1984, 182; Ring and Rosing, 223, (Their NDEs were significantly different compared to their NDE-interested persons, individuals who had not had an NDE or been close to death.); and Kohr, R. (1982) Near-death experience and its relationship to psi and various altered states. *Theta*, 10, 50-53

⁴⁵ Ibid; Greyson in Ring, 1984, 318. Here Ring relates information from Greyson's article "Increase in psychic and psi-related phenomena following near-death experiences" before it was actually published in *Theta*.

⁴⁶ The chi-squared values for all items, except for communication with the dead, was $p < .001$ or even lower. Greyson in Ring, 1984, 318; and Sutherland 99-100.

⁴⁷ The following definitions apply to the first set of "experiences" from Sutherland's study. These are taken from Ring's Psychic Experience Inventory (PEI), since that is what Sutherland used to survey her experients: Clairvoyance: "an awareness of an event which seems to come to you without your usual senses being involved"; Telepathy: "knowing what somebody else is thinking without that person telling you"; Precognition: Knowing when something is going to take place which could not reasonably have been predicted from other information"; Supernatural rescue: takes place in "situations where things are going badly for us or where we are at a loss as to what to do, when, suddenly, something quite unexpected occurs and rescues us from our plight"; Guidance: the sensation or feeling "that you were in touch with... 'guides' who help you to understand certain things"; Spirits: the sensation or feeling "that you were in touch with 'spirits'... who help you to understand certain things". (Ring, 1984, 285-291).

⁴⁸ Eighty percent of Ring's NDErs claimed to be more intuitive since their NDEs, while 58% of his NDErs reported that their insights into others since their NDEs had "strongly increased", 27% "increased", and 15% reported "no change" (Ring, 1984, 125, 173, 303). Only a few of Moody's experients seemed to acquire "faculties of intuition bordering on the psychic" (Moody, 1975, 91). There was a pre-NDE claim of being intuitive by 60% of Sutherland's NDErs, while afterwards the figure reached 95% (Sutherland, 1989, 99).

⁴⁹ Ring, 1984, 173 (96% of his NDErs reported this phenomenon); and Sutherland, 1989, 100-101 (This was reported by 92% of her experients).

⁵⁰ Ring, 1984, 172-173, 228. "Synchronistic occurrences" take place when "a pattern of events (is) linked more by meaningful connections than by logical causes", e.g. thinking of a song not heard for years and then, when you turn on the radio, it comes on. (Ibid, 285-291).

⁵¹ Ibid, 174-175.

⁵² Sutherland, 1989, pp 100-101.

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- ⁵³ Ibid, 100.
- ⁵⁴ Ring, 1984, 173-174.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, 317.
- ⁵⁶ Sutherland, 1989, 100-101.
- ⁵⁷ Ring, 1984, 173-174.
- ⁵⁸ Ring, 1980, 159-160, 170-171. See also Sabom, 179-181; Gallup, 128; Ring, 1984, 144-145; Moody, 1975, 141; and Grey, 96. Ring points out that non-NDErs also expressed a "net increase in religiousness", which in comparison to the NDErs, was not substantial. (Ring, 1980, 160).
- ⁵⁹ Ring, 1980, 162; and Ring and Rosing, 234.
- ⁶⁰ Ring, 1980, 162 (*Italic mine*).
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 159, 162-163; Ring, 1984, 152; Gallup, 128-129; Moody, 1975, 141; and Grey, 109-110.
- ⁶² Ring 1980, 162-163; Ring, 1984, 150; and Grey, 100. Grey speaks of "an awakened sense of a higher controlling power and the ability to be able to communicate with this supreme being" (Grey, 109). Some of Ring's NDErs said that "God" was too full of "conventional meanings" to be reliably used in describing their post-NDE "religious orientation". (Ring, 1984, 162-167). The term "God" is used in this chapter in reference to a variety of descriptions given by NDErs, all of which, even if they did not speak of the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of God, did conform to the idea of an ultimate force, being, and/or reality.
- ⁶³ Grey, 106-109; and Ring, 1984, 317. Grey reports that all of her NDErs - except for the two who did not believe in God before their NDEs - expressed an "increased certainty that God exists". (Grey, 106).
- ⁶⁴ Gallup, 128-129, 133; Ring, 1980, 162-163; Ring, 1984, 152, 317; Grey, 106-109; Sutherland, 1990, 30; and Greyson and Stevenson, 1194. Both prayer and meditation very significantly increased after the NDE among Sutherland's sample. They generally expressed the feeling that as a result of their NDEs they have an "ongoing, direct contact" with God, or a higher being. (Ibid).

⁶⁵ Grey, 99-101, 109; Ring and Rosing, 229-231; Gallup, 128-129; Moody, 1975, 79-80, 94; Green, 93; and Bauer, 41-43.

⁶⁶ Ring, 1984, 134; Moody, 1975, 89, 93; Grey, 96-98; Greyson and Stevenson, 1195; Ring and Rosing, 228; and Sutherland, 1990, 26, 28.

⁶⁷ For instance, Moody found that some of his experiencers were able to understand certain things in "religious writings, such as the Bible", only after having had their NDEs. (Moody, 1975, 141).

⁶⁸ Ring, 1984, 136, 317; Ring and Rosing, 226; Sutherland, 1989, 99, 101; and Grey, 100.

⁶⁹ Sabom, 32; Ring, 1984, 136; Grey, 99-100; Gallup, 129; Ring and Rosing, 229-231; and Sutherland, 1990, 26.

⁷⁰ Sutherland, 1989, 99-101; Sutherland, 1990, 26; and Ring, 1984, 172-173, 228.

⁷¹ Ring, 1980, 171-173. Also see Grey, 107. Ring found that 72% of NDErs expressed a positive change in their conceptuality of heaven and hell, while Grey reports that 56% of her NDErs changed their concept of hell and 34% had a change in concept of heaven (Ibid). Sutherland discovered that before their NDEs half of her experiencers believed in life after death, generally maintaining these beliefs from their religious training as children. After their NDEs all of these professed a belief in an afterlife based "on their own experience, which in many cases explicitly contradicts the views held earlier." (Sutherland, 1990, 29).

⁷² In this context these "organisations" are invariably Christian.

⁷³ Ring, 1980, 162-164; Sutherland, 1990, 30; and Grey, 107-109. Sutherland summarised her findings on this point in the following way: "Overall, there is a feeling among my sample that they now have an ongoing direct contact with God or a Higher Power that requires no mediation by institutions such as a church or interpretation by the teachings of any denomination or tradition." (Sutherland, 1990, 30).

⁷⁴ Ring, 1980, 162-164; and Grey, 108-109.

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- ⁷⁵ Ring, 1980, 162-165; and Grey, 107-109.
- ⁷⁶ Grey, 107-109.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 110.
- ⁷⁸ Nineteen (38%) experients claimed to attend church services before their NDEs, while afterwards there were only 11 (22%), of which at least 5 were not seriously committed to any one denomination, thus leaving only 6 (12%) who attended church services in a committed fashion. (Sutherland, 1990, 26-29).
- ⁷⁹ Two NDErs changed from belonging to no religion before the NDE to being religiously affiliated afterwards: one became a Roman Catholic and another a Buddhist. (Ibid, 25).
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 28.
- ⁸¹ Ibid, 26, 30. Comparatively 56% of the general population valued organised religion. Statistically, though, this post-NDE decrease in the value of organised religion had a chi-squared value of $p = .02$, which is significant, but not nearly as significant as $p = < .0001$, which was the measurement for her NDErs' changes in terms of increased prayer, and $p = << .0001$ for meditation, questing for spiritual values, receiving of spiritual guidance, belief in reincarnation, belief in life after death, and decrease in fear of death. (See chart, 26).
- ⁸² Ring, 1984, 143-146.
- ⁸³ Ibid, 276-279.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid, 282-283.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid, 123, 134-139, 145, 327.
- ⁸⁶ "Mainline Christians" were identified as Roman Catholics and members of "recognized major Protestant denominations (e.g. Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians)" (Ibid, 146).
- ⁸⁷ These were all members of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS).
- ⁸⁸ Ibid, 145.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 147, 312 (*Italic mine*).

⁹⁰ Ibid, 147-148.

⁹¹ Ibid, 149-156, 317.

⁹² Ibid, 153-156.

⁹³ Ibid, 316. The numerical information included in this table indicates the percentage of those persons in each group who responded in a way which supported Ring's theory: a "universalistically spiritual orientation" is the most likely "coherent world view" to characterise the experient's post-NDE spiritual development. (Ibid, 143-146). This means that each of the figures for items 1, 2, 5, 7, and 8 represent the percentage of persons who reported that since their "near-death episode" they were "more...inclined to agree" with the given statement. In contrast, the figures for items 3, 4, and 6 represent the percentage of persons who reported that since their "near-death episode" they were "less inclined to agree" with the given statement. (Ibid, 282-283).

⁹⁴ In Ring's treatment of his NDErs' "quest for meaning", he directly states that "some NDErs may become more involved in the affairs of their church", i.e., one way in which his NDErs said they "express their spirituality". (Ibid, 136).

⁹⁵ Ibid, 156-157.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 316. In theological terms it is useful to keep in mind that "life after death" does not necessarily mean a positive afterlife existence. (The statistics for "NDE involved persons" represent their support of Ring's theory relative to their becoming involved with NDEs. [Ibid, 156-157]).

⁹⁷ The most conservative, in a Christian sense, of all the groups was that comprised of NDE interested persons, of which only 36.4% tended to disagree that belief in Jesus Christ was the only way to Eternal life, especially since only 44% of them were mainline christians. (Ibid, 316).

⁹⁸ Ibid, 158-161, 317. Gallup found that 31% of his NDErs believed in reincarnation after their experience, compared to 23% of the general population, thus reflecting a statistical significance (Gallup, 141). Sutherland reports that belief in reincarnation among her

experiences was, pre-NDE 41% and post-NDE 78%, compared to 32% of the general public (Sutherland, 1990, 29). In Ring's 1980 publication of his results he makes his point quite clear: NDErs are more "open" to the notion of reincarnation than non-NDErs, yet "It is not...that core experiencers necessarily come to profess a belief in reincarnation; it is rather that the underlying idea of reincarnation no longer appears altogether implausible." (Ring, 1980, 182).

⁹⁹ Ring, 1984, 161-162.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 162.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 316.

¹⁰² Ibid, 163-164.

¹⁰³ Ring and Rosing, 227-229. These 54 non-NDErs were also members of IANDS. (Ibid, 215).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 234.

¹⁰⁵ Sabom, 179-181.

¹⁰⁶ Moody, 1975, 141 (*Italic mine*).

¹⁰⁷ There was a 27% decrease in religious affiliation among Grey's NDErs (95% to 68%) and a 38% decrease among Sutherland's NDErs (54% to 16%). In contrast there was a net increase in interest in organised religion of 12% among the 26 NDErs who completed the LCQ in Ring's 1984 study, a negligible effect on religiousness among Ring and Rosing's 74 NDErs, and no change in religious affiliation among Sabom's 61 NDErs. Gallup found that 39% of his NDErs had their previous religious beliefs strengthened, 20% reported that theirs were not strengthened, whereas 41% gave no response to the relevant question (Gallup, 128).

¹⁰⁸ Grey, 101; and Irwin, H.J., and Bramwell, B.A. (1988) *The devil in heaven: a near-death experience with both positive and negative facets. The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 7 (1), 38-43.

¹⁰⁹ Atwater, P.M.H. (1992) Is there a hell? surprising observations about the NDE. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 10 (3), 155.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 155.

¹¹¹ Ibid. It is suggested that children's NDEs represent advanced instructions or opportunities to "preview their lives". See also, Ring, 1984, 134-136; and Bauer, 45-46.

¹¹² Atwater, 159.

¹¹³ Kimberly Clark in Flynn, C.P. (1986) *After the beyond: human transformation and the near-death experience*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 83-86.

¹¹⁴ Atwater, 159; and Grey, 56-57.

¹¹⁵ Moody, 1975, 25-26, 84-88; Ring, 1980, 84-87; and Gallup, 36, 50.

¹¹⁶ Ring, 1984, 91-92; and Sabom, 200.

¹¹⁷ Ring, 1984, 91-99. Ring states that the adjustment to "ordinary life" is particularly difficult in the first year following the NDE. See also Insinger, M. (1991) The impact of a near-death experience on family relationships. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 9 (3), 141-181.

¹¹⁸ Atwater, P.M.H. (1988) *Coming Back to Life: The After-effects of the Near-Death Experience*. Dodd Mead, New York.

¹¹⁹ Badham, P. (1990) *Near-death experiences, beliefs about life after death, and the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. International Buddhist Study Center, Tokyo Honganji, 17.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ For example see Grey, 96-100, 107; Ring, 1984, 144-145; Ring and Rosing, 228; Ring, 1980, 166-168; and Sutherland, 1990, 22-23. In Sutherland's 1990 study she found that none of the 50 experiencers perceived their NDEs to be a "religious experience", 70% perceived it to be a "spiritual experience", 2% both a "spiritual and religious experience", and 28% reported that it was neither spiritual nor religious. (Sutherland, 1990, 25).

¹²² Cherry, C. (1995) Are near-death experiences really suggestive of life after death?, chapter 12 in *Beyond death: theological and philosophical reflections on life after death* (1995) edited by Cohn-Sherbok, D., and Lewis, C., Macmillan Press LTD, London, 152-157.

CHAPTER SIX
THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE:
INTERPRETATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

1.0 Introduction

The main goal in this chapter will be to reach a final decision as to whether or not the fundamental significance of the NDE is to be found within an interpretative context which is pareschatological/eschatological. There can be no question that the prevailing interpretative assumption made by theologians, as described in chapter one, is inextricably linked to the notion that the threat of physical death is at the heart of the NDE's etiology. Thus, per our planned method as stated in the same chapter, the issue at the centre of our investigation below will be the NDE's cause, or trigger, and the ways in which the understanding of this issue has influenced not just the NDE's theological interpretations themselves, but, more to the point, the context in which they have been formulated.

2.0 Physiological, Pharmacological, and
Psychological Explanations of the NDE

Basically, there are three different ways in which the NDE's uniqueness is denied, where it is reduced to one or a combination of relatively well-known and predictable phenomena. Whether it be in physiological or psychological terms, the assumption is always made that the person is experiencing "nothing but" the

reactions of his/her body or mind to a real or perceived threat of death. The same assumption is made by those who offer a pharmacological aetiology of the NDE, except, instead of the threat of death, the "person" is reacting to an externally facilitated change in his/her body's chemistry. Again, as we review the most common ways these ideas have been expressed the question of whether any of them can justify an eschatological contextualization of the NDE should be at the front of our minds.

Starting with the physiological perspective, many believe it reasonable to assume that, in a great many of the cases, physical trauma has caused a disruption of *the experient's blood gas content*. In instances where there is an almost complete absence of oxygen in the brain, i.e., cerebral anoxia, distinctive changes in perception and emotions, similar to those described by NDErs, have been observed, e.g., feelings of confidence and contentment along with hallucinations concerning death and an afterlife.¹ Even where there is a moderate decrease of oxygen in the brain, known as brain hypoxia, mental functions may become altered and, in some cases, subjective phenomena occur which can produce an altered state of consciousness, for some, also mirroring a number of NDE phenomena.² Such an altered state of consciousness can also be produced by hypercarbia, an elevated level of carbon dioxide in the brain caused by the cessation of blood flow, upon which the removal of carbon dioxide depends.³

A dysfunction of the limbic lobe caused by stress, such as a lack of oxygen in the brain, can cause *temporal lobe epilepsy* (seizure), or *temporal lobe*

excitation syndrome, effecting those parts of the brain having to do with memory and affective states. Thus, the physical trauma associated with coming close to death may result in such a hyperactivity of the limbic lobe, possibly causing many NDE-like phenomena (e.g. depersonalization, intense emotions such as euphoria, as well as auditory, visual, or kinetic hallucinations).⁴

The release of natural chemicals produced by the brain to combat physical pain and extreme stress - *opioid peptides (especially endorphins)* - have been cited by reductionists as the cause of, at least, the NDEr's feelings of painlessness and peace. It is also believed that, in some cases, these natural drugs may also be responsible for limbic lobe dysfunction, thus acting as endogenous hallucinogens.⁵

According to the *sensory deprivation* interpretation, the lack of sensory input from the external world can lead to the excitation of the central nervous system, which, when the experient's awareness remains, causes the brain to construct an "inner" reality (i.e. a "complex dissociative hallucinatory state") by using its own memories and random firing in the visual cortex.⁶

Pharmacologically, the NDE is seen as a dissociative or visionary experience which, at its heart, is fuelled by any number of drugs effecting the experient's mind (e.g. anaesthetics, narcotics, and psychoactives).⁷ Here we are left with the option of associating this understanding of the NDE either with the influence of drugs 1) directly related to a putative close brush with death, or 2) outside of any death, or near-death, context.

At the heart of every psychological reduction of the NDE is the premise that the human mind will do anything and everything to avoid, and even deny, its termination. The NDE is therefore believed by some to be an extremely realistic and vivid *dream or fantasy*; a product of *wishful thinking* (i.e. the desire to change death from the absolute termination of one's life to a pleasant trip to a beautiful afterlife); or the erroneous fulfilment of prior expectations (e.g. those based on religious ideas or knowledge of NDE testimonies). On a more analytic level, some such interpreters appeal to Carl Jung's "collective unconscious" as the source of such prior expectations.⁸

Another of the psychological defence mechanism theories posits that the NDE is caused by a reactivation of *birth memories*. Here it is posited that when a person is confronted with the possibility of dying the external world is psychologically cut off, resulting in a mystical, ineffable experience grounded on the ego's regression to a pre-verbal state.⁹

The psychological theory which many find most convincing is known as *depersonalisation*; a theory, as the others, which is dependent on the concept of the mind's attempt at self-preservation. Here it is reasoned that with the onset of extreme anxiety fear of imminent death is created, or, *vica versa*, fear of imminent death causes the experient to become extremely anxious. A splitting of the "person" follows as the experient (i.e., his/her "ego") separates him/herself from the endangered physical body and the corresponding anxiety in order to avoid death. Hence, it is asserted that experiencers think that they have escaped death

since, in this depersonalized state of mind, they believe that they are already dead and, therefore, that death cannot take place again.¹⁰

3.0 The NDE Researchers' Responses

However convincing these theories may be most primary NDE researchers eventually reject each of them. Their positions are founded on a what they believe are phenomena consistently reported among the majority of those studying the NDE, phenomena which are seemingly both invariant and incompatible with the idea that the NDE is not a unique, irreducible phenomenon. Probably the most fundamental of these is stated as the NDE's apparent unpredictability, i.e., no single factor, or combination of factors, has been found which would predispose a person towards having an NDE or not.¹¹ Another more inclusive argument against the reductionists is the great similarity of the NDE contents among experiencers in contrast to what is viewed as their relatively insignificant differences. Other points include: 1) the supposed verification that experiencers were truly unconscious or even "dead" during their NDEs; 2) the presence during the NDE of phenomena which seem absolutely incompatible with earthly, "normal" reality and the experiencer's "normal" state of being (e.g., feelings of peace and painlessness, acute awareness, profound cognitive processing, and revelations); 3) the finding that NDEs are usually phenomenologically different from experiencers' prior expectations of what death was like; and 4) the transformational after-effects of having an NDE.

Apart from the researchers' own findings, they also defend the NDE's uniqueness by showing how the reductionist can only explain parts, or aspects, of the NDE yet are unable to account for it as a whole. Individual theories may also be challenged by appealing to the details taken from specific NDEs which "clearly" invalidate the theory in question. All of these techniques will not be rehearsed here; a few examples from one of the primary researchers will suffice to illustrate the researchers' basic position.

Sabom rejects the psychological explanations for the NDE along several lines. From one perspective he poses two key, rhetorical questions. If the NDE is a subconscious fabrication in the face of death, in order to escape death, then why do not *all* people in such a situation have an NDE? If depersonalization depends on the experient's perception of the imminence of his/her death, then why do some NDEs take place *after* the loss of consciousness? He also believes that the NDE cannot be reduced to a dream since 1) "all" of his subjects who were asked, emphasised the vast difference between the unreality of their dreams and the reality of their NDEs, and 2) the contents of dreams are highly variable from night to night and person to person, in sharp contrast to the NDE's consistency. The theory of prior expectations is also ruled out in the light of NDEs' responses to interview questions. Here he points out that his experients reported that their NDEs were quite different from what they had previously thought such an encounter with death, or near-death, might be like.

Sabom deals with the physiological and pharmacological interpretations in a representative

manner as well. He says, that, unlike the NDE, the NDE-like hallucinations and delusions brought on by drugs are "highly variable and idiosyncratic" in content and structure. In addition, he stresses that many people have had NDEs without drugs. His anecdotal evidence even suggests that drugs may actually "inhibit the formation and/or later recollection of an NDE." Sabom appeals here to a clinical experiment conducted in the United Kingdom. It revealed that the effects of endorphins lasts from 22 to 73 hours, whereas the peace and painlessness reported by NDErs last only as long as their NDEs, abruptly ending when they regain consciousness. Those carrying out the experiment also reported that the endorphins caused somnolence and sleep, which, Sabom would remind the reductionists, is incompatible with the "hyper-alertness" experienced by NDErs.

Although he admits that there are some similarities between the two experiences, he is quite to point out that, unlike what is commonly report as taking place during an NDE, during a dysfunctional temporal lobe experience 1) perception of the immediate environment is often distorted, 2) emotions are characteristically negative, 3) the senses of smell and taste are characteristically present, 4) there is a reliving of only a "random, single event of no particular significance", and 5) forced thinking¹² is typically present. Citing the results of two studies done on the effects of brain hypoxia, Sabom also explains that this causes mental confusion rather than the clarity of thought and awareness described by NDErs. On the other hand, from studying relevant research, Sabom does say

that he found that hypercarbic experiences, although different from NDEs in several ways, were remarkably similar to the NDE. Nonetheless, he insinuates that it was not the hypercarbia *itself* which caused the NDE-like experience, but that it only brought the person so close to death that that - *being close to death* - triggered the NDEs. He bases this idea on one anecdotal case. *During his NDE* an experient saw a doctor take blood from his body, which, when analysed later, showed that he was not suffering from hypercarbia at that time.¹³

Given that he is a cardiologist we might have expected Sabom to do such an admirable job of defending the NDE against the reductionists. Yet, the debate between the non-reductionists, represented by the NDE researchers, and NDE sceptics does not end here. The sceptics will counter such counterarguments in a number of ways, e.g. attacking the researchers' methodologies, rejecting anecdotal evidence, citing new scientific findings relating to NDE-type phenomena, etc. For example the researchers' critical appeal to the NDE's apparent universality, or invariance, is criticised on methodological grounds by Zaleski:

In short, the universality and nonmythological character of near-death testimony is a matter of perspective...Such unanimity as is found, moreover, might be considered an artifact of the interview technique, a product of summary generalizations that mark underlying differences or a sign of conformity to unacknowledged cultural patterns.¹⁴

Susan Blackmore directly rejects the anecdotal case which Sabom used to disprove the sceptics' claim that NDEs are caused by hypercarbia, citing research published eight years later: "Gliksman and Kellehear

point out that peripheral blood measures are not reliable indications of cerebral blood gases".¹⁵ She also maintains that even though a person can have an NDE without the presence of anoxia this does not necessarily mean that anoxia is never the cause of an NDE, since NDEs "can be set off by many things".¹⁶

What ultimately seems to be at stake is much more basic than particular interpretations of the NDE. At the heart of the matter, so it seems, is the question of whether or not one can legitimately appeal to, or even remain open to, the existence of some kind of transcendent non-material "reality" (e.g., the "mind" apart from the brain; a "soul"; or even a paranormal, mystical, or spiritual dimension). Hence, those offering either a reductionist or non-reductionistic interpretation of the NDE, whether they are aware of it or not, have made a very important decision. This choice concerns the related, quite practical, issue of whether or not to venture outside of the current paradigm of conventional science, which, by in large, deems invalid any theory which is based on such a transcendent non-material reality.

4.0 Analysis

Faced with the prospect of sorting out so much controversial and highly specialised information, and at the risk of being annoyingly repetitive, let us start our analysis by reminding ourselves of the basic question which we are seeking to answer: Does the cause of the NDE support the idea that the NDE's primary significance is limited to its eschatological relevance?

As we saw in chapter one, an affirmative answer to this question is assumed by most theologians regardless of whether they interpreted the NDE as 1) a literal experience of death, 2) a symbolic death experience, or even 3) a psychologically, physiologically, and/or pharmacologically based delusion. The relationship of this presupposition to the first two perspectives need not be reviewed, it is plain enough. In chapter one it was shown that at the centre of the third, most popular position is the assertion that the NDE is a phenomena of the living, for, it is reasoned, NDErs were never literally "dead" but, at best, only experienced part of the process of dying. Since NDErs did not really die and, therefore, could not have had a "real" glimpse of an afterlife, their experiences are relegated to theologically irrelevant pathological states. Hence, these theologians' final "interpretations" have been largely, if not absolutely, determined by the par/eschatological boundaries which possessing this fundamental assumption necessarily establishes. This can be likened to a person's solitary conclusion that, after having "analysed" it, a beautifully carved and painted wooden apple is actually of little, or no, food value. That his/her conclusion has nothing to do with the aesthetic qualities of the apple, or the skill of the artist who created it, is based on his/her consideration of the apple within a context strictly defined according to nutritional parameters. What then, in relation to the debate in regard to the NDE's etiology, can we say about the actual legitimacy of confining the significance of the NDE to what is par/eschatological meaningful?

The strength of the physiological explanations of the NDE's etiology comes from the notion that the experient has actually suffered some degree of physical trauma. The argument can be outlined as follows. First, the experient's body is traumatised in such a way that 1) a significant diminishment, or complete cessation, of respiration and circulation of blood causes a change in the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the brain (e.g. cerebral hypoxia, brain hypoxia and/or hypercarbia) and/or 2) the body goes into shock. Either of these can lead to the body's release of naturally produced chemicals (i.e. opioid peptides) to combat the physical stress and pain caused by the physical injuries. And, finally, any one of these three physiological reactions can cause a dysfunction of the brain's limbic lobe. Reductionists argue that both evidence and proven theories exist which show that NDE-like phenomena can be caused by any one of these pathological conditions and, therefore, that the NDE is nothing but a physiological reaction rooted in physical trauma. Whether they see the NDE as a unique phenomena or reduce it to a pathological condition, most theologians have also believed physical trauma to be, at least, that which triggers the NDE.

However, and this is a huge "however", what would happen if we were to discover that serious physical trauma is not a necessary prerequisite of having an NDE? The fact is is that a good deal of highly respected research has conclusively shown that *having or not having an NDE is not dependent on whether or not the experient suffered any significant physical trauma*. For example, in their extensive study of "death-bed visions"

over an 18 year period, Osis and Haraldsson found that many people seem to have NDEs at a time when they were not in any immediate danger of actually dying. This observation needs to be qualified though, for, even though the patients' medical records were used to determine the patients' physical conditions at the time of their experiences, most of them were seriously ill at the time.¹⁷ Yet, long before these researchers were even born another man had spent 20 years interviewing mountain climbers who had survived their falls. In the late 1800's Albert Heim published findings which showed that many of these people had experienced that which we now call NDEs apparently *as they were falling, i.e.,* before any serious injuries had taken place.¹⁸ In one of the earliest of our ten primary NDE studies used to construct the NDE typology, 18% of those who described having an NDE also said that they had escaped the "close brush with death without any injury".¹⁹ One year later Bruce Greyson, after studying the medical records of his 30 failed-suicide-attempt NDErs, discovered that there was no correspondence between the intensity of the NDE and the actual seriousness of the physical trauma which the experient suffered. In fact, it was more common for those who did not actually come close to physical death to report an NDE than for those who did.²⁰ At the same time as Greyson, three researchers had collected data which also showed NDEs to be triggered in situations where being actually "near-death" was purely an expectation; where, ultimately, there was never any physical injuries sustained.²¹ Two of these continued to work together studying out-of-the-body experiences and NDEs for more than another decade. They amassed a

wealth of relevant material, upon which they based their conclusion that: "the perception of being near death, independent of the actual reality of the situation, is the key determinant of the classical NDE."²²

As evidenced by our primary studies, Gabbard and Twemlow confirmed that the nature of any, and all, physical trauma which takes at the time of an NDE has no "dramatic effect on the phenomenological consistency" of the NDE.²³ However, they did find what they believed to be a slight correlation. Compared to other NDEs those associated with cardiac arrest could be distinguished by the experient's "significantly increased feelings of power" and tendency to meet putative deceased relatives more often. Both of these observations, the researchers suggested, implied that the cardiac arrest NDErs experienced something which could be described as an "after death" type of experience. Those experients whose NDEs corresponded to accidents, illnesses, drugs, anaesthetics and fever reported phenomena slightly more in-line with a "before death" experience, e.g., "seeing" the physical body and feeling joyfully liberated from it.²⁴ Even more to our point however, one detailed study has underlined not only the unpredictability of the relationship between actually being near-to-physical-death and having an NDE, but some interesting differences in the phenomenological make up between those who were actually close to death and those who were not. As typologically described in detail in chapter three, experiences of 1) the special, "enhanced" NDE light and 2) "enhanced cognitive powers" were reported significantly more often by those NDErs who, as judged by an examination of their medical records, had

been close to (physical) death during their NDEs compared to those who had not been close to physical death. These were the only two notable differences detected in the phenomenological profiles between the two groups. Overall this study showed that almost half (48%) of those who had NDEs had never come close to physical death yet, that of these, 84% believed that, at the time of their NDEs, physical death was either imminent or had already taken place.²⁵ In an earlier, connected study, two of the same researchers had reported that, after studying their medical records, of 40 people who remembering having NDEs at a time when they thought that they were close to death 22 (55%) were really not close to death at all. The overall conclusion of this work was very similar to that of the one above: it is highly probably that it is a person's perception that he/she is about to die which is the "principal precipitant" of his/her NDE.²⁶

Thus the reality is that the awareness, or "perception", of being near-to, or threatened by, death is a much more important aspect of whatever triggers the NDE than whether or not a person suffers any physical trauma. It is not unreasonable to say then that the phenomena subsequently experienced in this situation may have absolutely nothing to do with actual physical death, in which case the par/eschatological contextualization of the NDE may very well be inappropriate. If this point were accepted, those few theologians who interpret the NDE as a literal journey of the soul into the afterlife would almost certainly abandon their interpretation of the NDE. However, it is clear that one could still make a strong argument for

the NDE as a symbolic death experience. This is an example of an approach which need not be par/eschatologically limiting, as an investigation of what it is that makes the experience symbolic may not necessarily be related to the par/eschatological nature of the symbols themselves. Most in our reductionist group probably would not change their minds at this stage, for 1) they never thought the NDE was a "real" experience of physical death anyway and 2) the pharmacological and psychological explanations of the NDE would remain just as convincing. In fact, few would disagree that the psychological argument has become even stronger, a notion which we will turn to next.

Before we do so, it is crucial to remember that, just because the NDE does not seem to be triggered by actual physical trauma does not mean that we can regard the experient's physiological condition as unrelated and unimportant to understanding NDEs. As we have just observed above, there is reliable data which implies that there is some kind of correlation between the nature of the phenomena experienced during the NDE and the experient's physical condition. If this is true, those who believe that the NDE represents a literal separation of the self, soul, or mind from the physical body will have an even more difficult time justifying their position. Many questions still do need to be answered in respect to the relationship between the experient's physical state of being and the NDE, not least of which is, How can the perception of the threat of death be the cause of NDEs if many experients had been semi- or fully "unconscious" at the time when their NDEs?

Now if the NDE is not triggered by any physiological pathology but, instead, by the experient's awareness of what is perceived to be the imminence of his/her death, then it is not difficult to comprehend the rationality of reducing the NDE to one, or several, psychological pathologies. Notwithstanding this observation, in most cases the arguments used to equate the NDE with other psychological phenomena and the theories attached to them can be shown to be quite problematic and, therefore, less than convincing. For example, for someone today to say that "NDEs are no more than dreams", is practically the same as saying "I am not familiar with the phenomenological NDE research done in the last twenty years". For at least ten years now informed scholars have recognized that the NDE's invariance and subjectively "real" nature decisively distinguish it from what we all experience in dreams and waking fantasies, as pointed out already above by Sabom. Respected and informed "reductionists" and/or "sceptics" have not used this argument for quite some time. On a more sophisticated level is the saganomics theory; the use of birth models to explain the NDE. If the NDE is going to be identified as a reactivation of a person's birth memories then one would have to show, first, that at the time of birth a human being is capable of organising and "storing" a great deal of complex sensory information. One can make sense of mentally re-living a "memory" only to the extent that that particular memory is cognitively coherent. Of course, for many people, the image of going through a "tunnel" into a bright light might sound similar to what being born might be like. But that is the problem, "might be like" is the

best that I can do in reference to what happened, from my perspective, when I has born. Indeed, that this theory also enjoys little favour today is largely due to its being forcefully rejected by the philosopher Carl Becker, in terms of the intractable problems related to a new-born child's undeveloped eyesight and mental capacities.²⁷

Many, in their attempt to explain away the NDE's distinctiveness, appeal to the experient's expectations or cultural conditioning. It would be a rare NDE study indeed - speaking here of the major, more comprehensive pieces of original NDE research which have been done in the last 20 years - that did not report the invariable conviction of experiencers that their NDEs were completely different from 1) anything they had ever experienced before and 2) what they had expected would take place at the time of physical death. However, the accuracy of such retrospective self-assessments can legitimately be called into question. More convincing though are the studies which have been done with children who have reported NDEs. The overwhelming similarities between the phenomenological content of childrens' and adults' NDEs makes it very difficult to maintain either prior expectations or cultural conditioning as psychological explanations for the NDE.²⁸ There is also the historical argument. By taking a long look back many believe that the NDE has been a significant phenomenon throughout human history. Typically such chronologies begin with Plato's now famous story of the soldier Er, who "died", had out-of-the-body and transcendent experiences and then, when sent back to earth, came back to physical life.²⁹ The Tibetan book of the Dead³⁰ and the Egyptian

book of the Dead³¹ are also thought by many to be informed by and/or directly related to NDEs.³² The most scholarly use of this approach has focused specifically on medieval, otherworld journeys and their correlation with ancient and modern day NDEs.³³ When taken to its extreme, this understanding of the NDE leaves one wondering not whether the NDE is caused by an individual's personal and cultural conceptualities of death and the afterlife, but whether ancient NDEs themselves have not served as the very basis for the conceptual models of death and the afterlife which have been articulated throughout history.³⁴ The influence on the NDE of the experient's culture and personality becomes quite evident when all the details of individual NDE's are compared with oneanother. Yet, as we have just seen here and as we saw in relation to the invariance of the NDE content in chapter three, that the NDE types can be reduced to "nothing but" one's cultural conditioning and prior expectations seems extremely improbable.

The psychological explanation of the NDE which has enjoyed the most favour is based on the concept known as depersonalisation. Above this was introduced in terms of a splitting of the self such that some form of anxiety could be avoided. According to the researchers primarily responsible for this association of the NDE with depersonalisation, Noyes and Kletti, Heim's detailed descriptions of what falling mountain climbers experienced could easily been seen as the anticipation of a syndrome "commonly reported by emotionally disturbed patients to which the term depersonalization was later applied."³⁵ One of the factors making this

pathological condition such a tempting way to explain the NDE is the fact that it was even before Moody brought the modern study of "near-death experiences" into being in 1975 - with the publication of *Life after life* - that Noyes and Kletti were collecting their own cases of what they would diagnose as depersonalisation. When they finally published their completed findings in 1976³⁶, findings based on a study of persons "suddenly threatened with death", it was immediately obvious to many that there was a direct connection with Moody's overnight best-selling "NDE".

The fundamental connection between the NDE and depersonalisation is that both the patients suffering from this pathological condition and the NDErs describe phenomenon which strongly suggests a separation from their conscious self of that aspect of themselves which is thought to be the object of a deep, identity determining anxiety. In other words, because those people in their study who had believed that they were actually "about to die" reported (Moody-type) NDE phenomena significantly more frequently than those who did not think they were about to die, Noyes and Kletti concluded that it was the perception of being near-to-death which triggered what had become known as the NDE, just as depersonalisation among psychologically ill patients was known to be caused by their own perceptions. Although this reinforces our rejection of the physiological reduction of the NDE as stated above, let us explore the theory of depersonalisation a bit further to see if it is a reasonable explanation of the NDE.

More specifically, depersonalisation correlates 1) the patient's reduced awareness of parts, or the whole, of the his/her body and 2) a dream-like awareness of his/her physical environment with subconscious anxieties concerning, in most cases, his/her sexuality. It is rather questionable that the splitting of the patient's mental and physical self-images and the corresponding reduction in the "realness" of his/her environment are psychologically equivalent to the NDEr's separation of his/her "essential self" from the physical body and transcendence of the physical environment. In fact, that they cannot be harmonised is highlighted by Noyes' and Kletti's own recognition of three major points of divergence: 1) unlike the NDEr's enhanced perceptual and cognitive abilities, depersonalised patients have "consistently complained of a generalized dulling or numbing of perception and mental imagery"³⁷, 2) unlike the quite commonly reported NDE life review, "a revival of memories is...not found among patients suffering from depersonalization"³⁸, and 3) in contrast to the typically profound affective character of the NDE, depersonalized patients are usually "distressed by the emotional blunting they experience."³⁹

These researchers also admit that such significant differences should not be so surprising given that the theory of depersonalisation is based specifically on the analysis of mentally ill people. What they propose is that these differences simply underline how the depersonalisation "syndrome" manifests itself in a different context.⁴⁰ It is of little surprise that many have found such a rationalisation for reducing the NDE to the pathological state of depersonalisation

unacceptable. Indeed, one might ask, What value is there in offering an NDE interpretation the meaning of which is grounded on what is almost always a completely different context? In reality, this concept has come to be used to explain so many body-mind phenomena that it has practically lost its original, clinical meaning. In his own attempt to understand the nature of the NDE Scott Rogo put it this way: "Depersonalization is really not an explanation for anything, but merely a category or label for a wide range of unusual experiences. So the sceptic who equates NDEs with depersonalisation is merely reclassifying the experience".⁴¹

We have already noted that the presence of children's NDEs severely weakens the reductionists' arguments that the NDE is only the fulfilment of personal expectations or manifestation of cultural conditioning. It would seem that other, more defence-mechanistic psychological theories, like that of depersonalisation, would also be difficult to maintain in the light of a child's undeveloped conceptual constructs. How could a very young child's NDE be only a reaction to his/her fear of death if the child has not yet developed a concept of death? The psychological reduction of the NDE is, again, seen to be inappropriate. However, though rejecting depersonalisation, Gabbard and Twemlow have proposed that even though it is not the *fear of death* which triggers the NDE, it may very well be elicited by a "response to catastrophe". This theory is based on the idea that, from the very beginning of an infant's life he/she develops an "extensive psychological" defence system "against the possibility of extinction".⁴² They

speak of this in terms of the child's "faith" that he/she will get food and be taken care of. The conclusion of these researchers' intriguing, yet highly speculative, theory is that NDEs might be caused by a "preconscious or conscious apprehension of some form of catastrophe"⁴³. What is meant by *preconscious* is not quite clear, yet it may be linked to these researchers' idea that this "response" might, especially in the light of the NDE's invariance across time and cultures, be genetically encoded. It is probably no coincidence that they located the ultimate etiological factor of the NDE in our genetic makeup, since this is the very conclusion that the paediatrician Melvin Morse came to in his studies of children's NDEs, the same studies which Gabbard and Twemlow reference in their discussion of children's NDEs.

Twelve children who had NDEs and 121 who had been seriously ill but did not report any NDEs made up Morse's study population. At the end of his efforts to understand the specific cause of these 12 NDEs, Morris saw a connection between the NDE-like phenomena which was sometimes produced by both physical and pharmacological changes in the brain's temporal lobe and the "spiritual" experiences Wilder Penfield's patients described when he stimulated their right temporal lobe with an electric probe. Morse does not actually think of himself as a reductionist though; he believes that there is nothing necessarily contradictory about understanding the separation of the "soul" from the physical body - i.e., the NDE - in relation to our genetic structure. That this is, essentially, another physiological explanation for the NDE is made clear by

Morse's insistence that all of his experiencers' NDEs were triggered by the actuality of being physically dead or on the brink of physical death.⁴⁴

Maybe there is a genetic element which does need to be figured into the NDE's etiology, just as there is probably a psychological. It should be stressed that it is those efforts which are made to completely negate the NDE's distinctiveness which have, at best, been extremely difficult to justify and, at worse, led to the abandonment of research to better understand the NDE, and therefore, better serve the needs of NDErs. Those interpretations of the NDE which are psychologically reductive can be countered on one more front, the arguable connection between physiological changes and the NDE phenomena themselves. For, as we observed in chapter three, a large proportion of all NDErs have no recollection of any particular phenomena associated with their return to their physical bodies. Now it would seem that, if the NDE is just a psychologically determined event, given the mind's supposed construction of an elaborate illusion to reassure the person that everything is "alright", it would also "put them back in their bodies" via an appropriately reassuring illusion. And, if the NDE is only a pathological delusion then why is it that many NDErs "return" simply with the resuscitation of their physical bodies? In the end - no pun intended - the psychological reduction of the NDE is highly problematic.

Thus far we have seen that it is somehow the perception or awareness of the threat of death which triggers the NDE, and that it is possible that physiological, and probable that psychological, factors

influence its content. As we come to the end of this analysis we would do well to consider the technical fact that it is actually the memories of NDEs which is our object of investigation. In connection with this point, veteran NDE researcher Bruce Greyson reminds us, the "temporal location" of the NDE cannot be absolutely established for it could have all taken place before the experient became (physically) unconscious (if he/she ever did) or sometime after consciousness was regained.⁴⁵ Although Greyson discusses these possibilities in relation to psychological theories, and since we have dealt with such concepts already, this point is presented here in order put a brief treatment of the pharmacological reduction of the NDE into perspective. In the light of our analysis of the NDE types and NDE after-effects, we might anticipate that the following observations, by focusing specifically on an alteration of consciousness itself, may be the single most relevant topic having to do with the NDE's etiology.

Does the idea that the NDE is an *Altered State of Consciousness* (ASC), necessarily, have to be understood as a reduction of the NDE? It definitely becomes reductionist when its existence is made to depend on what is explained as some other precipitating phenomena, e.g., brain hypoxia as indicated above. The pharmacological approach to the NDE's etiology is itself invariably described in reference to many drugs' effects of eliciting ASCs. Yet, research has shown there is an inverse relationship between the presence of drugs in the experient's body and 1) the depth or extent of the NDE and, possibly, 2) the probability of having an NDE in the first place.⁴⁶ On a more common-sense level, that

NDEs are not caused by one, or even one type, of drug is relatively plain, for NDEs are reported by many people who were not under the influence of any drugs at the time of their experiences. Even if some NDErs did have narcotics and/or psychoactives in their systems at the times of their NDEs, one would be hard pressed to attribute the NDE's phenomenological content to them. The effects which these drugs have on a person's states of mind are now quite well documented; users of these have highly variable experiences which, in almost every case, they are aware are not "real". Certainly after having even an extremely "real" experience, unlike NDErs, the user knows that what took place was a hallucination. Hence, the idea that the ASCs produced and shaped by such drugs is largely unreconcilable with the NDE's invariance and the experient's conviction that his/her NDE was the most "real" experience he/she has ever had. The same has been shown to be true concerning the various anaesthetics used in medical situations⁴⁷, however there does seem to be one possible exception, i.e., the drug known as ketamine.

Used since the mid-1960s as a general anaesthetic, patients who had been under the influence of ketamine often reported how they seemed to have left their bodies, sometimes travelled to "otherworldly" realms, and, many times, believed themselves to be dead. It is the out-of-the-body experience produced by ketamine though which is its strongest connection with the NDE, many of its other effects are much more akin to the hallucinations produced by Lysergic Acid (LSD). On the other hand, it was the negative psychological effects these overwhelmingly negative experiences tended to

produced that resulted in the discontinued use of ketamine.⁴⁸ Analysing a great deal of NDE and neurophysiological research, Michael Schroter-Kunhardt has forcefully argued that NDEs might indeed correspond with, but are not dependent on, certain alterations in the brains processes, such as might be caused by ketamine. We do well to stress his findings that NDEs can not be reduced to the effects of such substances, or even to these brain processes themselves:

By no means can the NDE be psychopathologized....While some critics maintain that the NDE is a dysfunction of the brain, this would entail a dysfunctional, confused/incoherent and individually different experience which has destabilizing, disintegrating and psychopathologizing effects for the experiencer. But the NDE is just the opposite: it constitutes a completely unexpected peak capacity of the human brain and has psychohygienic/psychotherapeutic effects which exceed those of many psychotherapies....though the features of the near death experience are reproduced in drug-induced states, this points to a physiological substrate rather than to their etiology.⁴⁹

Recalling Sabom's theory concerning hypercarbic experiences, it may also be possible that ketamine - keeping with the properties and desired effects of most general anaesthetics - brought patients so near to physical death that their "perception" of death's imminence was itself what triggered their NDEs. Or, more in accord with Schroter-Kunhardt, could it be that the ASC elicited by ketamine is the same as that experienced by NDErs - or one of the many different ones which NDErs possibly may experience - but with slightly different characteristics due the drug's negative effects? If we were to answer this question

affirmatively and pursue this line of reasoning would we not, then, be reducing the NDE to "nothing but" a delusion or hallucination?

Over fifteen years ago a relatively small, yet particularly helpful, article was published, in which the author argued that NDEs might be best understood in terms of a non-reductionists understanding of Altered States of Consciousness. The salient points of connection between ASCs and the NDEr were given as follows:

- 1) the lack of "logical transitions" between many of the NDE types may represent transitions from one "discrete" ASC to another,
- 2) these transitions might not be remembered by NDErs because, during this time, his/her consciousness is in a "disorganised state",
- 3) during these transitions "psychological and/or physiological patterning forces" could be "constructing a new discrete state", and finally,
- 4) the NDE's ineffability may be attributed to the exclusivity of the "cognitive structures" specific to the NDEr's ASCs.⁵⁰

This correlation of ASCs with the NDE seems to accord well with what we have established above, that the NDE's etiology can not be reduced to, but is probably *influenced* by, physiological, psychological and/or pharmacological factors. These "factors" - i.e., "patterning forces" or, what Drab calls in another place, "psychophysiological correlates"⁵¹ - should not then be thought of as 1) causes of the NDE, or 2) that

which determines the NDEs phenomenological content, but as something like cognitive, or consciousness, contextualisers. Perhaps we could liken the theoretical changing of each discrete ASC - as reflected in the differentiation of NDE types - to the divers conceptualities a person might have of an object viewed through a variety of spectacles, each relatively different in terms of the colour and/or shape of the lens. Yet this is a poor comparison, since it makes the changes in the individual's perceptions primary. Surely a better metaphor would somehow incorporate the alteration of one's state of consciousness itself. Here then what we would be trying to understand is how to conceptualize changes in an individual's consciousness itself without equating such changes to any of their physical and/or psychological concomitants. At the same time we would also need to account for the continuity of the individual's personal identity. It is easy to see now that if the content of the NDE is related to ASCs then the possibility that the experient literally existed in a disembodied state would almost certainly have to be discarded. Hence, once again, the par/eschatological contextualization of the NDE becomes practically untenable.

What we have just stated quite explicitly in the paragraph above has been implicitly suggested from the very beginning of our analysis: the crucial issue in the investigation of the NDE's etiology has to do with the very nature of human being. Have we not been dealing with many different ways of trying to account for a radical change/alteration of what is usually considered to be virtually definitive of human being, i.e.,

embodied, reflective consciousness? Certainly we can now say that the validity of any NDE etiological theory is ultimately determined by its ability to account for the reported change in, and of, the experient's consciousness. As we found in our analysis of the NDE typology, this can be artificially broken down into three areas: 1) changes in the experient's consciousness of self (e.g., "disembodied"); 2) changes in the experient's consciousness of his/her context or "world" (e.g., physical-yet-untouchable and/or wholly transcendent); and 3) changes in the fundamental character of consciousness itself (e.g., enhancement of perception, enhancement of cognitive processes, and/or presence of new abilities to interact with other sentient beings). From the very beginning of our investigation it has been shown that such matters are inextricably linked to the basic issues at stake in the debate about personal identity. Accordingly, these are crucial to our understanding of what it means to be a person at all. Hence, we see once again that, even in relation to its etiology, it is the NDE's ontological uniqueness which is the key to understanding the NDEs primary significance.

As one of the individuals making up the small group of scholars still seriously examining the NDE, Christopher Cherry has come to a very similar conclusion. He argues that the NDE evidences the possibility of positing personhood even if there is no longer any physically based consciousness. This is expressed by the affirmation of NDErs having "experiences hereafter" (i.e. "experiences of what lies beyond life"), even if it cannot be reasonably argued

that they also have "experiences of a hereafter" (i.e., "experiences of what lies beyond death"). The critical point in Cherry's conception of the NDE is his belief that the NDE can tell us something unique about the very nature of the relationship between human existence and consciousness, i.e., "having experiences". In fact, at the end of his argument he reminds us of the critical point that, "the ontological differences between experiencing a here-after and experiences hereafter are enormous".⁵²

5.0 Conclusion

Whether they be expressed in physiological, psychological or pharmacological terms, it has been shown that explanations which reduce the NDE to nothing but the reactions of the experient's body or mind to a real or perceived threat of physical death are simply not convincing. However, the distinctiveness of the NDE as a unique phenomenon does not suggest that it is completely unrelated to physiological and psychological changes. In fact, our investigation has led us to believe that the experient's awareness of being threatened with death is indeed strongly correlated with the NDE trigger. Given the inadequacies of the psychological explanations of the NDE and the probability that many people who have experienced NDEs were only semi-conscious or unconscious at the time when their NDEs began, there is still plenty of mystery surrounding the precise nature of this "awareness" and its relationship to the NDE phenomenology. This is highlighted by the reality that most people who are aware of being threatened with imminent physical death do not have an NDE. Could the fact that we are unable to locate precisely time when the NDE takes place (i.e., before, during or even possibly after the threat of death) provide us with a clue? Or, in connection with our understanding of children's NDEs, could this awareness be described in terms some sort of "preconsciousness"? We saw that the theory that the NDE represents one or more Alerted States of Consciousness, if applied in a non-reductive way, could possibly be a fruitful way of exploring this mystery. Yet if one were

to take this approach one would undoubtedly find it rather challenging not to end up endorsing some disguised form of reductionism.

No matter what approach is to be taken though, we have reached the conclusion that, as supported by our analysis of the NDE after-effects, at the centre of the critical issues relating to the context in which NDEs take place is the problem of personal identity and consciousness, i.e., the question of personhood. Therefore, in the light of our findings concerning the NDE event itself, we can now assert with confidence that the primary significance of the NDE is not to be found within an interpretative context which is pareschatological or eschatological, but one which, more fundamentally, is ontological.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Rodin, D.S. (1980) The reality of death experiences. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorders*, 168, 259-263.
- ² Blacher, R. S. (1979) To sleep, perchance to dream.... *The Journal of The American Medical Association*, 242 (21), 2291; Blacher, R. S. (1980) The near death experience *The Journal of The American Medical Association* 244 (1), 30 (which shows that hypoxia cannot account for the NDE as a whole). Also see Sabom, M. (1982) *Recollections of death: a medical investigation*. Corgi Books, Transworld Publishers LTD, London, 240.
- ³ Sabom, 241. See also Meduna, L.J. (1950) The effect of carbon dioxide upon the functions of the brain, in *Carbon Dioxide Therapy*. Charles C Thomas, Springfield.
- ⁴ Carr, D.B. (1981) Endorphins at the approach of death. *The Lancet*, 1 (Feb), 390; Carr, D.B. (1982) Pathophysiology of stress-induced limbic lobe dysfunction: a hypothesis for NDEs. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 2, 75-90; Noyes, R., and Kletti R. (1977) Panoramic memory: a response to the threat of death. *Omega*, 8, 181-194; Penfield, W. (1975) *The mystery of the mind: a critical study of consciousness and the human brain*. Princeton University Press, Princeton; and Sabom, M., and Kreutzieger, S. (1982) Physicians evaluate the near-death experience, in *A collection of near-death research readings*. edited by Lundahl, C.R., Nelson Hall, Chicago. Also see Sabom, where a professor of neurology explains the NDE as temporal lobe seizure, citing also the work of Penfield (Sabom, 236-7).
- ⁵ Carr, 1982, 75-89.
- ⁶ Siegel, R.K. (1980) The psychology of life after death. *American Psychologist* 35, 911-931; and Siegel, R.K. (1981) Accounting for 'afterlife' experiences. *Psychology Today*, January, 65-75.
- ⁷ Ibid; Siegel, R.K. (1977) Hallucinations. *Scientific American*, 237, 132-40; Osis, K., and Haraldsson, E. (1977) *At the hour of death*. Avon, New York; and Sabom, 230 (This explanation is provided by a physician at one of Sabom's talks on the NDE).

⁸ Kastenbaum, R. (1995) *Is there life after death? the latest evidence analysed*. Multimedia Book Limited, London (updated edition of 1984 edition, Rider, London); and Schnaper, N. (1980) Comments germane to the paper entitled 'the reality of death experiences' by Ernst Rodin. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, 168: 269.

⁹ Grof S., and Halifax J. (1977) *The human encounter with death*. E.P. Dutton, New York; Sagan, C. (1979) *Broca's brain: reflections on the romance of science*. Random House, New York; and Greyson, B. (1983) The psychodynamics of near-death experiences. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 171, 376-381.

¹⁰ Noyes, R., and Kletti R. (1976) Depersonalisation in the face of life threatening danger: a description. *Psychiatry*, 39, 19-27; Noyes, R., and Kletti R. (1976) Depersonalisation in the face of life threatening danger: an interpretation. *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 7, 103-114; and Noyes, R., and Kletti R. (1977). For the history of the denial of death and the psychological theories associated with this idea see also: Freud, S. (1959) Thoughts for the times on war and death. *Collected Papers: volume four*, Basic Books, New York; Peister, O. (1930) Shockdenken und Shock-Phantasien bei Hochster Todesgefahr. *International Zeitung Psychoanalysis*, 16, 430-435, translated by Kletti, R. as Mental states in mortal danger. *Essence*, 5, 5-20; and Becker, E. (1973) *The denial of death*. The Free Press, New York.

¹¹ Both Ring's and Sabom's research has produced data which might suggest that persons with a previous knowledge of NDEs are actually less likely to have them than those who have had no exposure to NDEs (cf. Sabom, 84; and Ring, 1980, 202.) However, Ring and Rosing have produced results which might imply that those abused as children could be more prone to having an NDE (Ring and Rosing, 219-221). Relatively minor, cross-cultural NDE, or NDE-related, studies do exist, the findings of which can be cited as generally supporting the NDE's invariance, e.g., Stevenson, I., and Pasricha, S. (1986) Near-death experiences in India - a preliminary report. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 174 (3), 165-170; Counts, D.A. (1983) Near-death and OBE experience in a Melanesian society. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3 (1), 115-136; as well as those by Sutherland (which consisted of Australian subjects). These studies also revealed that the character of certain

NDE types is culturally conditioned, e.g. the Indian NDErs encountered their own gods instead of Jesus Christ and/or biblical figures.

¹² Forced thinking is "the crowding of random thought and ideas into the mind of the patient in an automatic and obtrusive way." (Sabom, 238).

¹³ Sabom, 208-244.

¹⁴ Zaleski, C. (1987) *Otherworld journeys: accounts of near-death experiences in medieval and modern times*. Oxford University Press Inc, New York, 180.

¹⁵ Blackmore, S. (1993) *Dying to live: science and the near-death experience*. Grafton, London, 52.

¹⁶ Ibid, 51.

¹⁷ See Osis, K. (1961) *Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses*. Parapsychological Monographs, New York; Osis, K. and Haraldsson, E. (1977) Deathbed observations by physicians and nurses: a cross-cultural survey. *Journal fo the American Society of Psychical Research*, 71, 237-259; and Osis, K. and Haraldsson, E. (1977) *At the hour of death*. Avon, New York.

¹⁸ Heim, A. (1892) Notizen uber den tod durch absturz. *Jarbuch des Schweizer Alpenclub*, 27, 327-337. translated (1972) as *The experience of dying from falls*, Noyes, R., and Kletti, R., *Omega*, 3, 45-52.

¹⁹ Greyson, B., and Stevenson, I. (1980) The phenomenology of near-death experiences. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 137 (10), 1193-1196.

²⁰ Greyson, B. (1981a) Near-Death experiences and attempted suicide. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behaviour*, 11, 10-16; Greyson, B. (1981b) Toward a psychological explanation of near-death experiences: a response to Dr. Grosso's Paper". *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 1, 2, 94-97; and Greyson, B. (1981c) "Empirical evidence bearing on the interpretation of near-death experience among suicide attempters". Paper presented to the annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles. as reported in Rogo, D.S. (1989) *The return from silence a study of near-death experiences*. The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough.

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- ²¹ Gabbard, G.O., Twemlow, S.W., and Jones, F.C. (1981) Do near-death experiences occur only near death?. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 169, 374-377.
- ²² Gabbard, G.O., Twemlow, S.W. (1991) Do 'near-death experiences' occur only near death?. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 10 (1), 41. See also Gabbard, G. O., and Twemlow, S.W. (1984) *With the eyes of the mind: an empirical analysis of out-of-the-body states*. Praeger Publishers, New York.
- ²³ Gabbard, G. O., and Twemlow, S.W. (1984) *With the eyes of the mind: an empirical analysis of out-of-the-body states*. Praeger Publishers, New York, 152 (*Italic mine*).
- ²⁴ Ibid, 152-153.
- ²⁵ Stevenson, I., Cook, E.W., McClean-Rice, N. (1989) Are persons reporting "near-death experiences" really near death? a study of medical records. *Omega*, 20 (1), 45-53.
- ²⁶ Cook, E.W., Owens, J.E., and Stevenson, I. (1990) Features of "near-death experience" in relation to whether or not patients were near death. *The Lancet*, 336, 1175-1177.
- ²⁷ Becker, C. (1982) The failure of Saganomics: why birth models cannot explain near-death phenomena: the failure of saganomics. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 2, 102-109.
- ²⁸ For example the pediatrician Melvin Morse has been a leader in this area of NDE research: Morse, M., Conner, D., and Tyler, D. (1985) Near-death experiences in a pediatric population: a preliminary report. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 139 (June), 595-600; Morse, M., Castillo, P., Venecia, D., Milstein, J., Tyler, D.C. (1986) Childhood near death experiences. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 140 (November), 1110-1114; Morse, M., and Perry, P. (1990) *Closer to the light: learning from the near-death experiences of children*. Villard, New York. See also Bush, N.E. (1983) The near-death experience and children: shades of the prison-house reopening. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3 (1). 177-194.
- ²⁹ Plato (1993) *The Republic*. translated by Robin Waterfield, : Oxford University Press, Oxford.

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- ³⁰ Becker, C. (1985) Views from Tibet: near-death experiences and the Book of the Dead. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 5 (1), 3-20.
- ³¹ Budge, E.A.W. (1967) *The Egyptian book of the dead: the papyrus of Ani in the British Museum*. Dover, New York.
- ³² Serdahely, W.J., and Walker, B.A. (1990) Historical Perspectives on near-death phenomena. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 9 (2), 1990, 105-119.
- ³³ Zaleski, C. (1987) *Otherworld journeys: accounts of near-death experiences in medieval and modern times*. Oxford University Press Inc, New York.
- ³⁴ For example see Zaleski and Roberts, G, and Owen, J (1988) The near-death experience. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 153, 607-617.
- ³⁵ Noyes, R., and Kletti R. (1976a) Depersonalisation in the face of life threatening danger: a description. *Psychiatry*, 39, 19-27 reprinted in *A collection of near-death research findings* (1982), edited by Lundahl, C.R., Nelson-Hall Inc. Publishers, Chicago, 64.
- ³⁶ Ibid and Noyes, R., and Kletti R (1976b) Depersonalisation in the face of life threatening danger: an interpretation. *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 7, 103-114.
- ³⁷ Noyes, R., and Kletti R. (1976a), 62.
- ³⁸ Ibid, 63.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 62.
- ⁴¹ Rogo (1989) 170-171.
- ⁴² Gabbard and Twemlow (1991) 41.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 45.
- ⁴⁴ Morse, M., Conner, D., and Tyler, D. (1985) Near-death experiences in a pediatric population: a preliminary report. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 139 (June), 595-600; Morse, M., Castillo, P., Venecia, D., Milstein, J., Tyler, D.C. (1986) Childhood near death

experiences. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 140 (November), 1110-1114; Morse, M., and Perry, P. (1990) *Closer to the light: learning from the near-death experiences of children*. Villard, New York.

⁴⁵ Greyson (1981b) 97.

⁴⁶ Greyson, B., and Stevenson, I. (1980); Osis, K., and Haraldsson, E. (1977); and Roberts, G., and Owen, J. (1988) The near-death experience. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 153, 607-617.

⁴⁷ Morse (1990) 218; Gabbard and Twemlow (1984) 150-153; Rogo (1989) 181-186; and Schroter-Kunhardt, M. (1993) A Review of near death experiences. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 7, 230-233.

⁴⁸ See Jansen, K.L.R. (1990) Neuroscience and the near-death experience: roles for the NMSA-PCP receptor, the sigma receptor and the endopsychosins. *Medical Hypotheses*, 31, 26-28; Morse, M., Venecia, D., and Milstein, J. (1989) Near-death experiences: a neurophysiological explanatory model, *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 8 (1), 48-59; Rogo (1989) 121-128; and Rogo, D.S. (1984) Ketamine and the near-death experience. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 4, 87-96.

⁴⁹ Schroter-Kunhardt, 231-2 and 233 (quoting here psychiatrist L. Appleby).

⁵⁰ Drab, K. J. (1981) Unresolved problems in the study of near-death experiences: some suggestions for research and theory. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 1 (1), 36-41.

⁵¹ Drab (1981) 40.

⁵² Cherry, C (1995) Are near-death experiences really suggestive of life after death?, Chapter 12 in *Beyond death: theological and philosophical reflections on life after death* (1995) edited by Cohn-Sherbok, D., and Lewis, C., Macmillan Press LTD, London, 145-163.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE AS AN IMPERATIVE OF VITALITY

1.0 Introduction

Our investigations in the last six chapters have brought us to the point where we can begin to analyse the NDE in a relatively new way, outside of the boundaries within which treatments of this unique phenomenon have been, by an large, theologically jaundiced. Indeed, by scrutinising in great detail the most relevant data and concepts relating to the failure by most theologians and scholars of religion to go beyond these pareschatological/eschatological boundaries, it has been shown that neither the NDEs' "content" nor "context" support the predominant theological presupposition at the root of this situation, i.e., that the NDE's primary significance has to do with what it can or cannot tell us about the survival of physical death. Of course it is recognised that the NDE is par/eschatologically relevant to the NDE, but only to that degree in which any ontological understanding of personhood is relevant to par/eschatological issues. We can make this assertion based on the positive findings of our lengthy enquiry: the NDE's primary significance centres on the fundamental questions of human being itself. This became more and more clear as, in considering the logical possibility of the survival of physical death in relation to the NDE contents, the NDEr's "essential self" was associated with the primary ontological

question (What might survive physical death such that it can be properly described as a person?). In addition, when examining the NDE's context we found that those after-effects which are the least ambiguous and most NDE-specific are those which correspond directly to the experient's being itself, i.e., post-NDE phenomena reflecting the unique nature of the NDE "essential self". In particular, these "given" after-effects strongly suggested an ontological understand of personhood which transcends many of our conventional concepts regarding a person's physical and mental being. Similarly, our discussion of the NDE's etiology led us to the conclusion that the NDE's "cause" also seems to transcend any of its possible physiological, psychological, and/or pharmacological concomitants. Yet, we did see that it was somehow the experient's awareness of a real, or subjectively real, threat to the existence of his/her being which probably triggers the NDE, thus making the "near-death" context a significant, if not mysterious, aspect of the NDE. Here too though, the critical issues associated with the NDE etiology remained ontological, i.e., personhood in terms of personal identity and reflective consciousness. So then, if exploring the NDE in an ontological context is to lead to a better understanding of its true significance, how shall we proceed?

Back in our analysis of the NDE typology we wondered whether, if by putting the question of the NDE essential self's literal disembodied to the side, one would be able to pursue the meaning of the NDE in terms of the question of personhood. Now that we have established that such an ontological context is indeed more than just appropriate

but required, it seems reasonable to proceed by using a method properly suited to such a context. As the NDE researchers Roberts and Owen observed almost ten years ago:

Systematic study (of the NDE) has been hampered by lack of definition and confusion of terms....This may be inevitable in a multidisciplinary body of literature. However...using the language of descriptive phenomenology free of causal attribution may enable classification and acceptance of a common nomenclature and facilitate interdisciplinary comparisons....¹

In line with our methodological needs, taking a phenomenological approach would render the issues concerning the "objective reality" of such transcendent phenomena as the NDEr's physical disembodiment and visitation of an afterlife relatively irrelevant. Besides for the freedom this would give us to explore the essence of the experient's being during his/her NDE and afterwards, it should be noted that, generally, phenomenology is extremely well suited to any subject where the nature of consciousness is of critical importance. In fact, phenomenology is, by and large, concerned with uncovering the very nature of human consciousness itself; the relationship between being and consciousness is here virtually indistinguishable. Let us take a moment to consider what exactly it is that makes this such a distinctive method for research.

Recognised as the father of phenomenology, Edmond Husserl's starting point was not, like Descartes, that "I" exist because "I" am having thoughts, but, the only thing about my thinking which cannot be doubted is that *there is a stream of consciousness*. An investigation of

that which makes up this stream (i.e., the contents of consciousness) is therefore the primary objective of phenomenology. As one proceeds, the question of whether the contents, or phenomena, are "objectively real" is irrelevant, for one must first focus on discerning the meaningful connections among the general forms facilitated by one's perceptions. Only after this has been done can these subjective "connections" be compared with those produced by others following the same method. Theoretically then what is subjectively real becomes intersubjectively real (i.e., "objectively real") when the meaningful points of unity in one's perceptions are the same as those of another individual. Thus, in its purest, philosophic form one's attention is focused on one's fundamental experience with the aim of discovering the very essence of the content making up the experience. This "eidetic" reduction is also a kind of meditation on the processes whereby these essences actually become conscious and, thus, the phenomenological method *should disclose the true/real person* for whom all phenomena has meaning. According then to the phenomenological method as envisioned by Husserl, consciousness itself should indeed be the key to approaching the ontological question of personhood.² The reasonableness of using this method to describe and begin to attain a fitting understanding of the NDE ought to now be quite evident.

But, one may ask, "How can you do a phenomenology of an experience you have never had?" It is true that I have never had an NDE, yet this point is not problematic if we are clear about the precise nature of the method which will be employed.

Unlike a purely philosophic use of the phenomenological method ours will be something more like that described by Roberts and Owen, i.e., a "descriptive phenomenology". This, more practical, approach now has a long history within many disciplines, where it has been usefully used as a tool to examine the nature of all kinds of phenomenon. A great deal of this method's strength lies in its non-normative or non-judgmental nature, i.e., the researcher makes a conscious effort to "bracket", or keep separate, as many assumptions and prejudices as she/he can in order to describe and understand the subject at hand as it is in itself. In other words, the idea is to let the phenomena speak for themselves as much as is possible. For example, the "perceptions" which a researcher is attempting to describe in terms of their meaningful unity need not be based on his/her "experience" of a certain human condition but on the raw data which has been collected in reference to the given condition. Certainly the vast amount of material now available in the area of the "phenomenology of religion" does not consist of, primarily, the authors' first-hand experiences of all the subjects covered. The main objective of those doing research in this way is to describe or portray as accurately as possible the phenomena in question without judging them from any one, particular religious perspective. The major works of Mircea Eliade³ are excellent examples of this approach, as are the "classics" *The Idea of the Holy*⁴ and *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*⁵ by Rudolf Otto and Gerardus van der Leeuw respectively.

Another important methodological aspect of our continued investigation of the NDE is that, in the interest of dealing with the NDE as thoroughly as possible and unless stated otherwise, our subject will be a "core-experiencer", i.e., an experient who has had either a transcendent or a combined NDE, as described in previous chapters. Unfortunately such specific phenomenological distinctions were made in only four of our ten primary studies, i.e., those conducted by Ring, Lindley, Sabom and Grey. Using their statistical information we are able to calculate a weighted average which suggests that 56%⁶ of the people who have an NDE will experience most of the NDE types which were identified in chapter Three?. The accuracy of this estimate can easily be challenged, given that it has been calculated regarding only a third of our total study population.⁷ Yet, based on the researcher's observation in Chapter Two ? and our knowledge of the NDE typology as presented in Chapter Three ?, it probably is true that about half of all experiencers report such a full-blown NDE. This should not deter us though from our goal of investigating the NDE as comprehensively as possible, but it is a factor which, in the final analysis, will have to be carefully considered.

We will also be taking into consideration the rather limited data available relating to "negative" NDEs. It is still highly questionable whether or not these actually occur with a frequency which would justify equating them with the well-documented positive NDE, since most of the major researchers have not had these sorts of experiences reported to them.⁸ However, a few respected NDE researchers do claim to have accumulated a

considerable number of these nightmare-like accounts.⁹ From these some posit that the full-blown negative NDE contains the same basic features, stages, or "types" as the positive NDE although with extremely unpleasant characteristics. For example, a person having a negative NDE may report a pervasive feeling of loneliness and fear, movement in a tunnel (which may be in an downward direction), the perception of being overtly and externally judged for past deeds, and an encounter with a transcendental realm which has an extremely discomfoting atmosphere and sometimes even includes demonic figures.¹⁰ Even though the status of negative NDEs will probably continue to be a point of disagreement among the researchers for some time, they may be able to help us better understand the object of our investigation. Where research-based information is relevant it will be included.

In practical terms we will begin by looking into the basic changes which take place concerning the state, or status, of the NDEr and his/her context. This should enable us to draw near to, what was called above, the "very essence" of the NDE. Further, more detailed, consideration is then given to the ways in which this is specifically correlated to the major NDE types and the NDE after-effects.

2.0 The NDEr and His/Her Context

From one perspective it can be suggested that there has never been, and will never be, a human being who has had a choice relating to 1) whether or not to be born, and 2) the conditions into which he/she started his/her

life. Therefore, it could also be said that each human being exists, during his/her "earthly" life, as an involuntarily posited, or thrown, being.¹¹ Within the same framework NDErs seem to be "thrown" a second time, for they unexpectedly and uncontrollably find themselves dwelling outside of their physical bodies, spatio-temporal environment, and earthly society. Simultaneously, the experienc exists purely as mind, consciousness, or spirit and is "located" in otherworldly realms. What is possibly most remarkable about this thrown state of being is that for the majority of NDErs it represents a kind of archetypal "return" or homecoming. However, this need not have the same joyous quality as that portrayed in well-known, biblical homecoming enjoyed by the Prodigal Son.

As we have seen in chapter three, during their NDEs experiencs are "conscious" - e.g., reflectively aware of their own existence, sensations, thoughts and "world" - and "active", yet their physical bodies shows no outward signs of this consciousness and activity. In this altered state of being NDErs usually possess the ability to communicate and "move", independent of their physical bodies, simply by thinking or willing. At the same time they are no longer restrained by, and have no effect upon, matter. This includes their inability to communicate with earthly, physical beings. Hence, it can be said that the NDEr has at least partially transcended material "reality" even during the experience of autoscopic NDE phenomena. During experiences of solely transcendent NDE phenomena this seems to be absolute, for in this particular state there is typically no awareness of participation in materially-grounded-reality

whatsoever. In addition, the experient's consciousness is commonly characterised by a significant enhancement in perceptual awareness and cognitive processes, adding greatly to his/her own sense of transcendence. In the light of these fundamental NDE characteristics we can argue that a distinctive "Out-of-the-Body-Experience" (OBE) is a definitive NDE structure: throughout the entire NDE the experient's locus of personal identity no longer corresponds to his/her physical body. Hence, from one perspective the NDE is defined by the experient's consciousness of existing in a state characterised by its transcendence of a physically grounded self and its context, i.e., its world and society.

This kind of "disembodied existence" is consistent with the experient's belief that, during the NDE, his/her existence was fundamentally of the "mind" or consciousness. The perception of being outside of spatial and temporal dimensions¹² is a key factor for this belief, as well as for many experients' conviction that they actually were an absolutely "spiritual" being. This self-understanding certainly seems fitting given the facts that 1) most believe that they had experienced physical death, 2) many NDErs feel that they had some kind of "spiritual body", and 3) most report interacting with "spiritual" entities and within "spiritual" realms.

It must be further noted that NDErs neither take, nor can reasonably be expected to take, the responsibility for consciously "causing" such a radical transformation of themselves and the environment as described above.¹³ Many NDErs report that they were not conscious when "separation" from their physically-grounded self and its world took place, while almost all

NDErs are unable to account for how their transformation occurred. It is typical for those experients physically conscious immediately prior to their NDEs to remember being "in" their physical bodies one moment and inexplicably "out" in the next. However, this is unlike most of the comparable spiritual or mystical types of experiences in which, to varying degrees, the experient can, and does, wilfully take part in an alteration of him/herself putatively along similar lines.

The presentation of the altered status of the experient given thus far makes it possible to assert that the "NDE world" is by nature an immaterial, or "spiritual", realm situated outside of time and space, where the NDEr exists as a re-thrown, disembodied being. Even socially NDErs find themselves outside of all terrestrial associations and in a "spiritual" society, which is more or less complex depending on each NDE. The native members of this NDE society generally function as spiritual guides or emissaries. In contrast to the NDEr, these beings are completely familiar with the environment and operations of the NDE world. They are the ones truly "at home" and inevitably in control, while the NDEr has little or no control over what, where, when, how, and why NDE world "events" take place. No matter if the experient is in the darkness/void dimension with only the powerful NDE presence or in a complete afterlife setting, filled with multitudes of spiritual beings, he/she associates in the NDE world wholly as a dependent sojourner. For positive NDEs this may be manifest in terms of the experient's feeling of being lovingly taken care of, while those having a negative NDE may experience this as a form of incarceration. The only exception to

this inability of the experient to act as a truly free agent is the apparent ability some NDErs have to influence whether or not they "return" to their existential lives.¹⁴ As we will see below, this is actually an illusory power. Therefore, from another perspective, the experient's NDE state of being is defined by the reality of being the "select" one who can make no selections: experients are at the centre of intimate, personalised attention in a completely foreign environment, where their freedom to choose and alter their circumstances is virtually nonexistent.

Experients' reactions to, and understandings of, the altered status of both themselves and their context to a great extent seems to pivot on the encounter with the NDE supreme being or supreme personal force. As two mutually exclusive manifestations of NDE "natives", the NDE (being of) light and powerful presence are particularly distinct in that they are frequently perceived as possessing god-like attributes. For example, the NDE (being of) light is customarily experienced as being omnipotent, especially in those instances where it envelopes experients such that they feel as if they are directly experiencing the power of life itself. This being/force is also frequently described as the source of all light in the spiritual realm, thus contributing to the experient's belief that it is both living and life-giving. As the initiators and "authors" of the NDE life review, both the NDE (being of) light and presence give the impression of also being omniscient. The authoritative NDE presence further convinces many experients of its omniscience, as well as omnipotence, by

imparting vast amounts of knowledge to them, both about themselves and the great mysteries of the universe.

In addition, most experiencers sense an intuitive familiarity with, and recognition of, these NDE entities. This undoubtedly strengthens the belief of many NDEers that these NDE types are disclosures of what is traditionally referred to as the monotheistic "God". Indeed many NDEers do use the words "God", and sometimes "Jesus", when talking of such events. This is not surprising given that most in our study population belonged to societies which have been predominantly Christian. Some others employ non-religious concepts which point to the same kind of reality (e.g. life-itself or the ultimate power/force in the universe) or simply state that they do not possess the language to describe such an ultimate being/force. On the other hand, it has not been uncommon for those having negative NDEs to have their experiences dominated by the presence of an extremely powerful evil being or force, which also tends to be recognized as "Satan".¹⁵ Reflecting on these experiences, it is no wonder that the NDE is invariably centred around the interaction with an authoritative spiritual being or force, no matter whether it be benign or malevolent.

Considering both the novel nature of the experiencer's state of being during his/her NDE - as a disembodied self existing outside of time, space, and earthly society - and his/her "innocence" in triggering these changes, it appears that he/she undergoes what can be described as a spontaneous and involuntary *transmutation*. Such a description could also be used for the NDEer's context as well. Even though experiencers have been estranged from

their existential state of being, the majority of them simultaneously enjoy an extraordinary sense of liberation, routinely accompanied by the feeling that this transmutation is strangely "natural". The obvious difference for those having negative NDE is that their transmuted context elicits anxiety rather than joy. Also, because all NDErs receive highly personalized attention typically from NDE entities they recognize or "know", most feel that they somehow "belong" in, and to, this NDE world. It can safely be said then, that for the majority of experiencers the NDE is essentially an unplanned, ultimate home-coming to a previously unknown "place" in a "spiritual" state of being.¹⁶

3.0 The Imperative of Vitality (IV)

3.1 The IV and the NDE Types

Given the fundamental NDE transmutation described above, it is posited that at the heart of the NDE as an "ultimate home-coming" is the disclosure to the experiencer of his/her essential self and its context. For example, inherent in most encounters with the NDE "God" is a simultaneous enlightenment and assessment of the experiencer, which divulges what seems to be understood as essential aspects of his/her being. On this level, as *their "essential self"*, experiencers come to recognize their primary need to be in a particular kind of relationship with "God", since this being/force is experienced as the source and sustainer of all life. From another perspective, those who encounter a powerful evil force/being also use language which suggests a

disclosure of their essential self along more moralistic lines, e.g., the state of their "soul" became painfully clear.¹⁷ However such encounters represent only one facet of the superlative disclosure effected via all the NDE types. Going beyond the concept of home-coming it is submitted that such a disclosure takes place because *during the timeless moments of the NDE experiencers receive an authoritative exhortation to live their unique lives authentically by conforming to what is revealed to be their essential being.* This was already implicitly presented in chapter three, particularly in terms of the differentiations made between the essential self and the physical body. Just as every NDE type presupposes the presence of the essential self, every NDE type also impacts experiencers in such a way that they experience their NDEs as wholly personal and externally intentioned events. Thus, it is further proposed that this "authoritative exhortation" is the foundation of the NDE as a whole; the reality which lies behind all the NDE types. For the remainder of this chapter, and the final one to follow, this phenomenon will be descriptively identified as an "Imperative of Vitality".¹⁸

We are now ready to turn our full attention to the NDE specifically as an "Imperative of Vitality" (IV), first by looking into the ways in which the IV manifests itself via the definitive NDE types then by examining its relationship to the NDE after-effects.

To begin with, it is once again recalled that NDEers are mysteriously separated from their physical bodies as well as from their spatio-temporal and social "reality". This has been identified above as the NDE OBE, a unique kind of disembodied existence. At the beginning of this

phenomenon it is common for NDErs to experience a sense of detachment - an attitude of almost disregard - concerning their physical bodies, their desire to live "in" them, and, in some cases, even a desire to "return" to loved ones. In the absolute emptiness of the NDE darkness/void dimension, a "place" which is "no place", these initial feelings of detachment and sense of well-being usually continue or even become more intense. Based on the rather limited information available concerning those having a negative NDE it seems as though they too conscious of this sensation of detachment yet with an accompanying feeling of unease. Reading their accounts it becomes apparent that such unease is directly related to the anticipation of what their ultimate fate is going to be.¹⁹ It is not unreasonable to say then, that for both positive and negative NDErs the darkness/void phenomena indicate that the experient's being is no longer defined by its relationship to the materially grounded, existential realm. It is little wonder that in this relatively simplified state of being the majority of NDErs experience a sense of increased personal vitality even if a negative affective state accompanies it. The IV is thus manifest here as a kind of "liberation", not just relative to the initiating threat to the NDEr's physical existence but, more fundamentally, liberation from the ambiguities which are part and parcel of day-to-day, or existential, human being. This liberation though is most relevant in terms of one's personal identity, as the intensity of the NDEr's experience more and more bring this aspect of self-consciousness into sharp focus. Accordingly, in the context of an NDE, the

"first", primary IV component is identified as the initiating *crisis*, which is followed by the liberating *transmutation*. As we will see next, the third primary IV component centers on what can be called *disclosure*.

The NDE darkness/void type can also be thought of as a preparatory stage leading to, in many cases, an epistemic metamorphosis. Although experiencers move through this darkness, many times being drawn or "pulled", such movement is usually reported only when the NDE (being of) light is also perceived. Given that experiencers instinctively know that the NDE light is their "destination", the darkness/void is here associated with a liminal state of being. This is confirmed by the finding that a subsequent communion with the NDE light, most of the time, does indeed bring about an "enlightened" state of being. For those experiencers who do not encounter the NDE light in the darkness/void, especially as a being, an unexpected meeting with an authoritative NDE presence is relatively common. The essential characteristic of this encounter is that, unlike the other NDE types, the presence is not described with reference to the "ordinary" senses, but is exclusively intuited or inferred.²⁰ Hence, much like the dawn of enlightenment as "light" in the "darkness", the presence - be it positive or negative - brings about transcendent differentiation and intense relationship in the void, or "emptiness". In addition, the benign presence usually furnishes the experiencer with vast amounts of knowledge. In fact, for many this experience, like that of the union with the NDE (being of) light, this encounter provides them with the fullness of all knowledge and understanding.²¹ This sharing of knowledge

typically serves as an aid in experiencers' meditations upon their conditions, which are almost always initiated by the presence's communication to them that they are at a critical point in their lives. The encounter with a special NDE presence which is negative accomplishes the same end though in more of an affective rather than cognitive manner. Here the experiencer comes to, once again, "feel" the true lack of potency, or vitality, of the finite, existential self's self-centeredness. Thus, no matter which extreme is experienced, the Imperative of Vitality evidences itself here as profound self-understanding.

As for the NDE light and NDE presence as mutually exclusive disclosures of a supreme being/force, it has already been stated above that both facilitate a critical disclosure concerning the experiencer's dependence upon "God" for his/her very existence. For those having a negative NDE the same need is obviously deeply felt, though instead of being manifest as joy and peace corresponding to God's great "nearness" it is "lived" as virtually unbearable anguish and distress due to the experiencer's estrangement from God.²² An important aspect of the positive experience of God in the NDE not touched upon yet, is that this being/force consistently "permits" experiencers to make their own decisions as to whether or not they should "return" to "physical existence". The choice is regularly presented to the experiencer in the form of a question, e.g., "What have you done with your life?", or "Are you prepared to die?" Coming from "God" such questions are obviously rhetorical, given to stimulate self-judgment. The experiencer is prompted to compare his/her essential self with his/her pre-NDE

existential self. Hence, we can say that in these "moments" it is the "authenticity" of his/her historical existence which becomes the predominant object of the experient's consciousness.

A particularly good example of this same manifestation of the IV in terms of the negative NDE is found in Moody's *Life After Life*, where he deals briefly with NDEs triggered by suicide attempts. He found that these NDEs were consistently characterised as "unpleasant". During such suicide-attempt triggered NDEs experients came to the realisation that 1) the conflicts they were trying to escape from were still present, "but with added complications", 2) they were helpless to do anything about these conflicts in their NDE state of being, and 3) the taking of life, even their own, was an act against the sacredness of life. These experients were forced to "view", or experience, the negative results of severely violating their own lives.²³ Actually, some researchers theorise, as pointed out in chapter three (?), that negative NDEs are not reported nearly as frequently as positive ones because experients feel ashamed and/or guilty and, therefore, either keep silent or even repress the memory of their NDEs.²⁴

Going back to the positive NDE, since such a self-assessment takes place in the presence of "God", experients have no choice but to judge themselves according to the NDE God's standard, for they must do so within the context of one or more of the following NDE phenomena: 1) the profoundly affecting love and acceptance emanating from the NDE God, 2) a divinely initiated and guided life review, and 3) the imparting of

extraordinary knowledge as the "truth". Thus again, in the encounter with the NDE (being of) light and/or benign presence the IV is readily discernible, since NDErs must reflect on their existential lives in the what they believe is the presence of God and on God's terms: the only "terms" possible for "God" are truth, or genuineness, i.e., authenticity. It should also be noted here that, since communication in the NDE is described as being "telepathic" in nature, there is no possibility for the experient to be consciously deceptive.

The NDE God is not the only NDE type which influences experiencers' decisions whether or not to "return", a whole host of "spiritual" beings can be found effecting NDErs in a variety of ways. In fact, this decision is, almost without exception, the central theme in the interactions with deceased loved ones and acquaintances, religious figures, and other spiritual guides.²⁵ Although, in contrast to encounters with the NDE God, these other spiritual beings tell experiencers that they must return. This is usually done when the entity/being communicates to the experient something along the lines of, "It's not your time yet". In some of the negative NDEs the same thing takes place, but instead of the malevolent entities communicating this message verbally it is done through negative gestures such as the pursuit or attack of the experient.²⁶ Obviously, those who have such encounters possess a great desire to escape from this situation and return to physical existence. The motivation here lies not so much in a conscious reflection upon one's need for positive self-development as it does on the felt need to get out of situation in which one is virtually impotent regarding control over

the situation. Conversely, we should recall the two main, "non-independent"²⁷ reasons the majority of positive NDErs give for their return, i.e., to fulfill their "purpose in life" and/or to be with loved ones who need them. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that the primary meaning of both the positive and negative NDE experiences here, in reference to returning especially, has to do with the experient's need to more fully realize and secure, within his/her existential life, the power of his/her essential self.

It is not difficult to understand why deceased loved so often take on the role of sending NDErs back to their existential contexts, for they command the experient's respect and obedience as individuals who are now, after their own permanent departures from existential being, presumably knowledgeable about such things as "returning" or "not returning". The same status is enjoyed by religious figures, with the frequently added distinction of emanating, or being surrounded by, the special NDE light. The experient's high regard for other, unrecognized entities undoubtedly lies in their perceived status as "natives" who are "free agents" or relatively self-determinant. It is intuitively understood by experiencers that they either possess delegated authority/power from some higher spiritual being/force or, like the loved ones, because they successfully exist on this level of self-realization, know what is required to abide in this state of being. For some experiencers this awareness of the entities' authority and/or personal self-realization brings with it a feeling that the "will of God" or the goal of existential life, respectively, has been revealed to them. Unfortunately the negative

NDEr is given the same impression via a kind of reprimand, much the same as a child who learns how to be a "proper" diner from a parent who has constantly punished him/her for each breach of dining etiquette. The Imperative of Vitality even expresses itself here in the simple, yet powerful, fact that virtually all of the NDE entities interact with experiencers as if they know them intimately, *calling them by name* and possessing the knowledge of their "spiritual" standing. Hence, these NDE types also assert, and many times further disclose, the experiencer's importance as a distinctive individual, as well as communicating his/her need for a reorientation in relation to their existential state of being.

It has already been mentioned that the NDE life review is related to the Imperative of Vitality in the terms of the experiencer's self-assessment in the presence of "God". One of the most common characteristic of the negative NDE is the feeling of being judged for one's past deeds. Further reflection on a few of the life review's characteristics, as detailed in chapter three, will show more completely the nature of its relationship to the IV. As the assertion of a unique life the IV can be discerned in at least three of the life review's primary features. Firstly, the "images" making up the life review are usually so vivid and "real" that experiencers speak of actually re-living them. Secondly, although unknown to experiencers before their NDEs, the seemingly externally selected life "events" making up their life reviews are perceived to be the most "important" moments from their lives, *highlighting both positive and negative personal characteristics*. These episodes are usually understood to be "hints" given to

demonstrate how the experient should always be; how he/she should go about living his/her existential life. Thirdly, life reviews initiated and guided by the NDE being of light or presence can be particularly revealing, for it is not uncommon for experients to report that as the life review images, or events, are "experienced" the being of light or presence stresses certain characteristics as being more desirable than others, e.g., the value of loving other people and acquiring knowledge. Again, during a negative NDE the same thing takes place, in relative terms, as events from the experient's life are scrutinized.²⁸ However, for both the positive and the negative NDE, describing this aspect of the life review as "judgments" per se is misleading, for it is invariably the experient's own impressions or feelings of the life review events which accuse or praise. We thus see that what is experienced as an actual re-living of selectively "edited" events from one's personal past can easily be interpreted as counsel on how to live one's historical life in tune with one's essential self; again, how to live authentically.

During the course of the NDE the Imperative of Vitality is probably illustrated most clearly in two ways, in an encounter with 1) the NDE supreme being/force, and 2) an ultimate "place" (i.e., the NDE transcendent otherworldly setting). Having covered the first of these already we turn now to a consideration of the second.

If the NDE darkness/void type represented a place which was actually "no place" then the NDE transcendent otherworldly setting represents exemplary "placeness". For those having a positive NDE this is the intensely

illuminated environment where no single source of light is found, since here there exists a oneness of all things with the light. Given the preternatural beauty and ultra-vividness which this variable environment usually possesses, it can easily be argued that the IV is expressed here in the form of an entire setting: each element proclaims vibrant (and thus authentic) existence.

Experients usually describe existing absolutely alone in the "emptiness" of the NDE darkness/void, while for the transcendent otherworldly setting they speak of brotherhood and sisterhood; feelings of oneness not only with the other NDE entities which are present but with the whole scene. The experient is presented with a lucid view of vitality; of right relationships between "things" and their essential natures, as well as between things and the other things which make up their "context". The IV is thus exhibited as a disclosure of the absolute rejection of estrangement and alienation. Hence, via the transcendent otherworldly setting the IV exposes estrangement and alienation as major symptoms of inauthentic existence. Like most NDErs, how could anyone interpret this as anything but "paradise"?

There are, as indicated above, rare instances where it has been reported that this place-of-places has an extremely discomfoting atmosphere, where darkness prevails and, sometimes, demonic figures (e.g. the "devil") exist. This, according to the NDErs who have "been there", is a place of extreme loneliness and terror. Indeed, "hell" is the word most used to describe this setting, a setting which definitely also focuses the experient's attention on the nature of their very being.²⁹ It is crystal clear to the experient that

the kind of existence this place offers is highly unattractive - such an experience facilitates some serious, if not personally monumental, questions about one's need for a reorientation of one's "self". Hence, in contrast to the positive NDEr's transcendent realm (where the IV lies behind a "setting" in which there is a harmonious unity among all elements, positively asserting authenticity), here the IV takes the form of a setting which reveals the horror of absolute "inauthenticity", as radical alienation and confrontational associations.

The widely diverse NDE "boundary" phenomena distinctly disclose the charging character of the IV. These phenomena include 1) encountering the NDE presence or otherworldly entities, 2) being reunited with deceased loved ones, 3) having a life review, 4) attempting to escape from a negative entity or setting, and/or 4) reaching a border or point of no return (usually in the transcendent otherworldly setting). In every instance, regardless of who makes the decision, NDErs return. To one extent or another, especially for the NDErs who experience these particular NDE phenomena, they are left with no doubt they are not able or ready to "leave" their existential lives. Consequently, positive as well as negative NDErs³⁰ return with the desire, albeit varying in intensity from person to person, to "live up to" this intimate and private call to personal vivification. The Imperative of Vitality is manifest here then as a commission to the experient to be in a manner which corresponds to an enlightened view of his/her essential self's nature. Certainly such phenomena as the interaction with other NDE entities and

the life review help to give this commission its specific shape, typically relating to the overarching purpose of the NDEr's existential life. In many cases in which deceased loved are encountered the same message is echoed in their caring insistence that the experient simply *must* return to his/her existential life.

This section can be summarised as follows. What begins as a crisis threatening the life of the existential self continues with the transmutation of this self and its context, thus, facilitating the experient's rescue. A corresponding disclosure of the experient's transmuted, now "essential", self and its context ensues, culminating with the experient's commission to "return" to his/her existential state of being in order to become more fully what, and accordingly who, he/she essentially is.

If indeed this description of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality is accurate, or even if it is only partially accurate, then the fundamental importance of the "death" associated with the Near-Death Experience must be ontological rather than physical. If we take our lead from Heidegger's well-known phenomenology of death one way of looking at this situation can be articulated in two statements:

1) If it is true that everyone who is living will eventually die, and therefore that "death" is a definitive characteristic of each person's being - as the singularly personal certainty of non-existence at any moment - then it can be said that all people living on the earth are beings-toward-death.³¹

2) In contrast to this, during their NDEs experients are *beings-toward-life*, for while the experient undeniably continues to exist the Imperative of Vitality asserts the singularly personal certainty of more intense existential being at any moment.

Indeed, as we noted in our analysis of the NDE's etiology, it has even been found that the longer the NDE lasts the less likely the subject is to believe that he or she is dead or dying.³² In one sense then, the NDE, as an IV, can be thought of as a test of the experient's capacity to be more open and responsive to a vivacious living of his/her life; a challenge to take on the responsibility of being what and who one is essentially. Yet the actual near "death" context is not unimportant to say the least. As we recall, this same analysis also showed that the NDE does appear to be triggered by the experients "awareness" of the threat of physical death, *no matter whether it is real or only "perceived" to be real*. The NDE presents us with something of a paradox then: for some, drawing near to the possible non-existence of one's known self leads to an assertion and affirmation of one's essential being. The NDE is a resounding articulation of being erupting out of the awful silence threatened by non-being.

3.2 The IV and the NDE after-effects

If our discussion above did not persuade everyone that the phenomena making up the contents of the NDE event are suitably described as an Imperative of Vitality, then this consideration of the NDE after-

effects should. Bold as this claim may be, it is confidently made, for our analysis in chapter four (?) did make it perfectly clear that the unambiguous NDE-specific after-effects are inextricably linked to the experient's very being. Invariably the NDEr experiences the reality that, no matter what the particular manifestations may be, his/her pre- and post-NDE selves are substantially different. Not only are the changes inescapable (i.e. of an imperative nature) but they are such that the NDEr experience life on a level which is undoubtably more intense (i.e. of a more vigorous or vital nature). Filling in the details of these points will enable us to complete our phenomenological re-interpretation, or better "re-description", of the NDE.

In our investigation of the NDE after-effects' ambiguous nature we discovered that the more an after-effect related to conceptual changes the more "shared" it would be with non-NDErs and the less predictable would be its particular expression. Yet it was also found that the depth or quality of these "chosen" changes was predictably much greater for NDErs compared to non-NDErs, due to the positive influence of those NDE-specific after-effects which were "given", i.e., those which *spontaneously happened* to NDErs. Thus it was shown that, even if non-NDErs do chose to make similar life-affirming changes, NDEs bring about a long-lasting, positive change in the majority of experients' values, beliefs and behaviour such that for many, unlike non-NDErs, a *significant reorientation of their pre-NDE lives eventually takes place*. Now, that the type of *being* the given after-effects point to is the same as the type of being experienced during the NDE itself (i.e.,

the essential self) can hardly be doubted, even if we simply list the more common, given after-effects: clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, supernatural rescue, out-of-body-experiences, the perception of auras, and, the most frequently reported, a greatly enhanced intuitive sensibility. The imperative nature of these phenomena can not be stressed enough; these are NDE definitive because they occur in a way that is practically uncontrollable, though only after these people have had their NDEs.

In addition, it is not difficult to see that most, if not all, of these phenomena have to do with living one's life in a much more conscious manner, or, to put it another way, with an enhanced awareness of one's self, its world, and a Reality which transcends the material world. Yet the nature of the vivacity evoked by the NDE-specific after-effects is more comprehensive than this. Our analysis of the NDE-specific after-effects of a significantly increased belief in life after death and decreased (if not eradicated) death anxiety led us to the conclusion that the NDE provides the experiencer with the convicted understanding that who they really are goes beyond the categories of physical existence. This is just one aspect of the NDE-unique after-effects which serves to reorientate the experiencer's personal identity in order that the NDE revealed essential self might express itself as spontaneously as possible. This is simply another way to describe the pursuit of "authentic existence" - as the maximisation of one's vitality - which is the goal of the NDE as an IV.

Perhaps the most telling sign of change in personal identity is the integration of the after-effects on a

"spiritual" level. From this perspective the change in one's self- and world-awareness can itself be described as transcendental. Combined with the chosen, conceptual after-effects this tends to find its most inclusive expression in many experiencers' quest to find the meaning of existence. That this definitive quest is not necessarily related to "religion" should be quite clear now, though it is centred on the spiritual nature of one's altered state of being. In fact, we should recall that changes in religiosity have been found to be one of the NDE's most ambiguous after-effects. The discovery that those having hellish NDEs many times convert to a bible-based, conservative Christianity following their experiences confirms that changes in religiosity are content-dependent, "chosen" after-effects. One might pursue this argument by pointing out that most who report having an NDE - which the up-to-date research shows still means "positive" NDEers - recount experiences which would support the idea that one need not be "religious", in the formal sense of the word, in order to pursue the realization of one's essential being. The given psychic/spiritual after-effects obviously contribute to the NDEr's perception of "God's" presence breaking into their post-NDE lives and must also encourage the commonly reported activity of "turning inward" to commune with this transcendent reality, i.e., prayer/meditation. For the negative NDEr the "presence" may be rather more disconcerting, in extreme cases experiencers have spoken of being "haunted" and/or "tormented" by the malevolent character of what they are enabled to perceive.³³ It is quite likely that these given, negative NDE after-effects also facilitate a fervent "prayer" life. Hence,

these transcendent-type perceptions and activities on the part of both negative and positive NDErs help us to understand why the majority of NDErs, whether it be in religious conversion or not, practically have no choice but to embark on a quest, to one degree or another, to understand the transcendent nature of their own being. Therefore, in the final analysis their quest can be described as a continuation of the Imperative of Vitality, as the experient is ultimately motivated by a desire to fully realize, and thus safeguard, the "spiritual" kernel of his/her being.

It was noted in our analysis of the NDE after-effects that the only thing ambiguous about the NDE-specific, given after-effects themselves had to do with the experient's difficulty in dealing with their unexpected presence and trans-normal nature. Another facet of the Imperative of Vitality is here indicated, though not just in terms of the experient's efforts to cope with the given after-effects themselves. On a more holistic level, it relates to the experients' overall *struggle* to integrate their pre-NDE self/being with the self/being which either 1) is evoked by these phenomena, or 2) continues to breakthrough, as a new form of being, in terms of manifestations of these phenomena. Even if our descriptive method does not enable us to discern between these two options, on one level the existential results are very much the same. It is not surprising then that, especially in comparison to non-NDErs, a great many experients are actually not able to pick up where they left off and live their pre-NDE lives in essentially the same manner. In fact, as we saw in chapter four, it is not uncommon for it to take years

for some experiencers to reach a state of "normality". "Two sides of the same coin" is a fairly accurate way of understanding the relationship between the NDEr's *struggle* and *quest*. We might even say that the former is essentially the negative of the highly positive latter, both reflecting a revamping as it were of the experiencer's very existence, which we now are well aware of is facilitated not just by the NDE event but the ontological impact its reality continues to manifest afterwards.

4.0 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that in being mysteriously rescued from a real, or perceived, life-threatening *crisis* the experient and his/her context undergo a radical *transmutation*. Subsequently the NDEr experiences the *disclosure* of his/her transmuted self and its context in a manner which, like the crisis and the transmutation, asserts his/her essential nature. Ultimately most experiencers return with a commission to harmonise their pre-NDE existential life with this NDE state of being; to live authentically, maximising his/her vitality. In addition, the given NDE after-effects can be described as continuing manifestations of the NDE revealed "essential self", which help to both motivate and guide the experient's *struggle*, and, more positively, *quest*, to harmonies his/her existential self with this "essential self". The depth and quality of these two chosen after-effects testifies to the profound, NDE-specific effect having an NDE has on experiencers' personal identity.

In the attempt to conceptualize these NDE phenomena in terms of a single, unifying phenomenon both a) the central components of the NDE "event" (crisis, transmutation, and disclosure) and b) the given and chosen NDE after-effects (combined to produce the experient's struggle and quest) have been described as manifestations of an "Imperative of Vitality". The NDE as an Imperative of Vitality represents not only a negation of physical death but, more importantly, *opposition to the essential self revealed during the NDE*, i.e., inauthentic being. Indeed, it has been argued

that, as an IV, the NDE is an authoritative exhortation to live one's life to its fullest capacity, by conforming to one's "essential self", i.e. living "authentically".

In contrast to the predominant interpretative perspective assumed by the majority of theologians dealing with the NDE, this has been a detailed demonstration of how the NDE's primary significance is ontological rather than pareschatological and/or eschatological. Nevertheless, what makes things extremely interesting is the fact that the near-death context remains of critical importance.

Accordingly, *all is still far from being understood*. The final paragraph of the last section highlighted what is probably the crux of the matter: even though we have been able to identify and describe the ontological dynamic reflected in the NDE event and NDE after-effects, understanding its precise nature in terms of its root cause and larger implications is a completely different matter. For instance, especially in relation to the given NDE after-effects, we need to ask, Is it that the experient is being "externally" or unconsciously *influenced*, at the very core of his/her being, by the same reality which generated the NDE in the first place, or could it be that the person is experiencing the manifestations of a change to his/her very being? This issue also begs the question of whether the "transmutation" of the NDE event represents only a change of the experient's awareness (e.g., an Altered State of Consciousness) or an actual alteration of his/her very being. From a strictly phenomenological perspective the attempt to make such a differentiation

could be considered highly questionable, for to separate the essential nature of one's consciousness from the essential nature of one's being would be for many quite meaningless. But for others this is a critical question, just as critical as the question of why the perceived imminence of physical death triggers an NDE for a few people yet not for most in the same situation. So, it seems even though our analysis in this chapter has given us a new, deeper understanding of the NDE, it also has acted as a prod, giving us a glimpse of a unique ontological phenomenon and entreating us to push on with our exploration.

ENDNOTES

¹ Roberts, G, and Owen, J (1988) The near-death experience. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 153, 616 (Italic mine).

² Husserl presented its program and its systematic outline in the *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* in 1913 (Husserl, E. (1982) *General introduction to pure phenomenology*. translated by Kersten, F., Nijhoff, The Hague, London.)

³ Eliade, M. (1979) *Patterns in comparative religion*. translated by Sheed, R., Sheed and Ward, London and Eliade, M. (1989) *Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy*. translated by Trask, W.R., Arkana, London.

⁴ Otto, R. (1936) *The Idea of the Holy: an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*. translated by Harvey, J.W. Oxford University Press, London.

⁵ Van der Leeuw, G. (1938) *Religion in essence and manifestation: a study in phenomenology*. translated by Turner, J.E., G. Allen & Unwin, London.

⁶ Ring 49/103; Lindley 43/100 (Lindley, J. H., Bryan, S., and Conley, B. (1981) Near-death experiences in a pacific northwest american population: the evergreen study. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 1, 104-124, 104-124); Sabom 41/61 (Sabom, M. (1982) *Recollections of death: a medical investigation*. Corgi Books, Transworld Publishers LTD, London); and Grey 38/41 (Grey, M. (1985) *Return from death*. Arkana [Routledge and Kegan Paul], London).

⁷ This represents 305 of 950 people.

⁸ For example, after hearing "many hundreds" of first hand NDE accounts Ring claims to have "never personally encountered a full-blown, predominantly negative NDE" (Ring, K. (1984) *Heading towards omega: in search of the meaning of the near-death experience*. William Morrow, New York, 44). In his national survey Gallop did find that some NDErs had mildly negative experiences or mixed positive and negative NDEs, but only 1% reported a hellish NDE. (Gallup, 76, 84). Sabom had made it clear in a number of places that he had never come across any

cases suggestive of a "negative" or "hellish" NDE. (Sabom, 37-38).

⁹ Atwater states that out of the more than 700 NDE cases she collected, from 1978 to 1992, 105 (about 15%) were of unpleasant NDEs. (Atwater, P.M.H. (1992) *Is there a hell? surprising observations about the NDE. The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 10 (3), 149-160). Over a period of 9 years Greyson and Bush have collected 50 "terrifying cases". (Bush, N.E., and Greyson, B. (1992) *Distressing Near-death experiences, Psychiatry*, 55, 95-110). Rawlings claimed that, according to his experience as a cardiologist (reviving people from clinical death), at least half of all NDEs begin hellishly with the heavenly phenomena following. He further claims that most NDErs only remember the heavenly, last portion of their experiences. (Rawlings, M. (1978) *Beyond death's door*. Thomas Nelson, Nashville). Dr. Charles Garfield, an expert on the psychology of death, reported that 4 (16%) of his 25 NDErs had negative visions. (Garfield, C. A. (1979) *The dying patient's concern with 'life after life', in Between life and death*. edited by Kastenbaum, R., Springer Publishing Co, New York). Grey also found that 5 (12.5%) of her 41 NDErs had "experiences that were hell-like" (Grey, 72). Lindley too relates that "partially negative or hellish experiences within a near-death encounter" were reported in 11 (20%) of the 55 cases of close brushes with death he studied, with the remaining 80% reporting either a positive experience or no experience at all." (Lindley, 114).

¹⁰ See, Grey, 58-70; Atwater, 153-155, and Irwin, H.J., and Bramwell, B.A. (1988) *The devil in heaven: a near-death experience with both positive and negative facets. The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 7 (1), 38-43. The table below illustrates the similarity between the "patterns" of positive and negative NDEs:

A Comparison of Grey's Prototypical Stages
of Negative NDEs and Ring's Prototypical NDE Stages

Stages in Grey's prototype of the <u>negative NDE</u>		Stages in Ring's prototype of the <u>(positive) NDE</u>
1	Fear and a feeling of panic	Feeling of peace
2	OBE	OBE
3	Entering a black void	Entry into darkness
4	Sensing an evil force	Perception of light
5	Entering a hell-like environment	Entering the light

(See Grey, 72).

¹¹ Some of the phenomenological terminology used in this chapter has been taken from the work of Martin Heideggarian. Therefore, it should be made clear from the start that these are used eclectically; I recognise the worth of many Heideggarian insights yet do not wish to endorse his whole philosophical system.

¹² Time is distorted during the NDE, sometimes it is slowed down but most often it is said to be nonexistent. (Hampe, J. C. (1979) *To die is gain; the experience of one's own death*. translated by Longman and Todd, London, 35; Ring, K. (1980) *Life at death a scientific investigation of the near-death experience*. Coward, McCann and Georghagan, New York, 95-96; Greyson, B., and Stevenson, I. (1980) The phenomenology of near-death experiences. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 137 (10), 1195; Gallup, G. Jr., with Proctor, W. (1983) *Adventures in immortality: a look beyond the threshold of death*. Souvenir, London, 31, 34; Greyson, B. (1990) Near-death encounters with and without near-death experiences: comparative NDE scale profiles. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 8 (3), 156; and Sabom, 32.

¹³ Even those NDErs whose experience is triggered by a suicide attempt are "innocent" in this respect.

¹⁴ In some cases experients do claim to make the decision completely of their own accord.

¹⁵ This point is stressed throughout both of Dr. Maurice Rawlings' books: Rawlings, M. (1978) *op cit.* and (1980) *Before death comes*. Thomas Nelson, Nashville.

¹⁶ This observation is valid even for those experiencers who, during their NDE, wanted to return to their existential lives, for such a desire is almost always based on the experiencer's perception that unfinished business must be completed before such a Home-Coming can become permanent.

¹⁷ See Atwater, 155 and Rawlings, 1978, 25.

¹⁸ On its most basic level the descriptive phrase "Imperative of Vitality" itself was chosen to stress 1) all those concepts having to do with urgency, and 2) all that stands opposite of "death". One of the primary reasons why "life" was not used instead of "vitality" then, is because "life" is too easily associated with *physical existence only*, which is far too restrictive a meaning for what the NDE actually is.

¹⁹ Irwin and Bramwell, 39-40 and Atwater, 156-157.

²⁰ In exceptional cases experiencers reported "hearing" the voice of a presence during their NDEs.

²¹ As we saw in chapter 3, those experiencers who receive such a wealth of knowledge inevitably cannot remember most of it after their NDEs. In some cases experiencers report that they do remember being told that this knowledge would be "erased" from their memories if/when they returned to terrestrial life.

²² See Rawlings, 1978, 110-115; Grey, 56-57; and Bush and Greyson, 99-102.

²³ Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975) *Life after life*. Mockingbird Books, New York, 143-144.

²⁴ See Grey, 56-57; Rawlings, 1978, 34, and 102-121; and Atwater, 159.

²⁵ It should also be pointed out that this decision is made either in an encounter with God or with one of these other spiritual entities. The experiencer is not presented with the choice twice.

²⁶ Atwater, 154, 156-157 and Rawlings 1980, 32-33.

²⁷ Ring, 68.

²⁸ Grey 58-70; Atwater 154-155; and Irwin and Bramwell, 39.

²⁹ See, Grey, 58-70; Atwater, 153-155, and Irwin and Bramwell, 38-43.

³⁰ See Grey, 72, Atwater, 157, and Bauer, M. (1985) Near-death experiences and attitude change. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 5, 45-46.

³¹ Heidegger, M. (1990) *Being and Time*. Translated (from the seventh German edition of *Sein und Zeit*) by Macgarrie, J. and Robinson, E. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. (See especially pages 279-304).

³² Greyson and Stevenson, 1195.

³³ See Grey, 72, Atwater, 157, and Bauer, M. (1985) Near-death experiences and attitude change. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 5, 45-46.

CHAPTER EIGHT
A THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

1.0 Introduction

At this point in our investigation we proceed with the confidence that our re-interpretation of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality is firmly grounded on both a research-based understanding of the phenomenological data as well as a critically arrived at conceptuality of the proper context within which the NDE's primary significance lies, i.e., that which is ontological. We have come to the recognition that the NDE is a phenomenon whose import is not about what comes after death but about life itself, yet not just as one among the myriad forms which life takes on in its human expression but as an imperative for an individual to transcend his/her state of being as it is grounded in and limited to the world of the mundane. It is thus that our phenomenological explication of the NDE as an "Imperative of Vitality" (IV) has focused our attention on the specific ways it is related to issues the contemplation of which take us to the heart of what it means to be a being in which self-transcendence would seem to be definitive. It is in this sense that the NDE necessarily raises questions about that aspect of being human which most would associate with things "spiritual" and/or "religious". In short, our detailed, comprehensive investigation of the NDE has brought us to the point where, if we are to take any more steps forward, we have actually have no choice but to explore

the NDE within a spiritual/religious context *per se*. As our initial interest was understanding the NDE from a theological point of view anyway we should proceed now with no further hesitation.

Firstly, we need to be clear about our methodology: by no means does our interpretation of the NDE as an IV itself suggest that there is only one spiritual model to which it must be exclusively associated. In fact, it is no doubt true that as a spiritual experience, and given its ontological significance, the NDE could be fruitfully explored from within most of the world's religious traditions. If one were to simply browse through an encyclopaedia of world religions reflections of the Imperative of Vitality's various elements - such as the sudden crisis of being, the externality of the experient's dramatic "transmutation" and the "return" as re-birth - would undoubtedly not be difficult to see throughout. Accordingly, although the NDE as an IV contains no features which would *prima facie* restrict its further treatment within a Christian context, the nature of the NDE could certainly be investigated from any one of the perspectives from which the Christian faith has been articulated. One such possibility which springs to mind would be to compare the NDE as an IV with Karl Rahner's ideas relating to his "Anonymous Christian", e.g.,

Therefore no matter what a man states in his conceptual, theoretical and religious reflection, anyone who does not say in his heart, 'there is no God' (like the 'fool' in the psalm) but testifies to him by the radical acceptance of his being, is a believer. But if in this way he believes in deed and in truth but leaves it free play, then the grace of this truth by which he allows himself to be led is always already the grace of the Father

in his Son. And anyone who has let himself be taken hold of by this grace can be called with every right an 'anonymous Christian'.¹

Another route within Christianity which might prove rather productive would be that centring on Paul Tillich's conception of God as the Ground of Being, expressed in one way in terms of the ecstatic experience:

'Ecstasy' ('standing outside one's self') points to a state of mind which is extraordinary in the sense that the mind transcend its ordinary situation. Ecstasy is not a negation of reason; it is the state of mind in which reason is beyond itself, that is, beyond its subject-object structure. In being beyond itself reason does not deny itself. 'Ecstatic reason' remains reason; it does not receive anything irrational or anti-rational - which it could not do without self-destruction. This is the state mystics try to reach by ascetic and meditative activities. But mystics know that these activities are only preparations and that the experience of ecstasy is due exclusively to the manifestation of the mystery in a revelatory situation. Ecstasy occurs only if the mind is grasped by the mystery, namely, by the ground of being and meaning. And, conversely, there is no revelation without ecstasy.²

This passage itself indicates the high level of compatibility which the NDE as an IV would probably enjoy with most of the "mystical" experiences found throughout the religious world.

Hence, although we have no choice but to continue our examination of the NDE within a spiritual context we are faced with the decision as to which context to enter, for it is well beyond the scope of the present work - as it would be beyond the scope of any single

piece of research dedicated even to this task alone - to adequately deal with all of the possible correlations of the NDE as an IV within the boundary of the world's major religious traditions alone. As it is the desire of the author to reach a critical, informed understanding of the NDE within the context of Reformed, Protestant theology this then will become the setting for the remainder of our inquiry. It would seem reasonable then for us to proceed by first pointing out the fundamental ways in which it would seem that the NDE as an IV is most relevant to such a context.

In the first place it is recognised that from this Christian religious perspective that place where the ontological question (What is a human being?) receives its most pointed answer is the vitalising restoration of the Creator-creature relationship known as Christian conversion, or the transformation of an individual to Being-in-Christ. As the "Call of God", or "God's efficacious Call", it is asserted by conservative Reformed theologian's that in this event of events God acts in a supernatural way such that an unredeemed, absolutely passive person's very being is transmuted from a state of spiritual deadness to fullness of life. If we take even a moment to reflect on the NDE's nature as an Imperative of Vitality we can immediately recognise that the radical 1) external intentionality, 2) alteration of being and 3) enhancement of one's vitality are all factors which this "Call" and the NDE would appear to have in common.

However it is not only this point of view which is of interest here, as it is recognised that the Reformed tradition is also represented by more liberal

theological approaches. Given its tremendous influence on this perspective to this very day, the position of Friedrich Schleiermacher seems a rather fitting choice then for consideration here as well, especially in terms of the possibility of achieving some kind of balanced, as it were, exploration of the NDE within the broad boundaries of Reformed theology. In the light of our own methodology, it is believed that this choice particularly appropriate in another sense as well, as Schleiermacher is considered by most to be the father of the phenomenology of religion. Let us take a moment then, as we just have for the conservative position, to anticipate the fundamental point of contact between Schleiermacher's system and the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality.

As we will see below in detail, Schleiermacher believed that it was within the very structure of human being itself, even unredeemed human being, that one's relationship with God was a given to be appropriated. He asserted that any experience had the potential to be "religious", to the extent that it focused one's self-consciousness on one's essential self, as that which is absolutely given by God. His mature work, *The Christian Faith*³, also contends that it is only through the salvific effect of conversion to Being-in-Christ that one can truly realise one's essential self and thus, with the actualisation of one's relationship to God, be liberated from sin and secure possession of eternal life. Therefore it would seem that the primary connection between the NDE as an IV and Schleiermacher will probably have to do with one's vitalising experience of the essential self, with its potential to

facilitate differing degrees of an individual's appropriation of the Creator-creature relationship, the maximisation of which would be the experience of conversion to Being-in-Christ.

Methodologically it should be noted that, as our primary intention is to explore the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality, our discussion will be structured in terms of the central components of the NDE event itself (i.e., crisis, transmutation, and disclosure) and then in relation to the NDE after-effects.

2.0 The Crisis

Although nobody knows what the precise connection is between the perception of coming close to physical death and having an NDE, reason dictates that, whatever it is, at least for us it must have an ontological significance corresponding to that which we have identified for the NDE itself. In terms of an IV, we described the initiating "crisis" of the NDE along the lines of an immediate threat of non-being directed at the existential self. Therefore, our goal in this first section will be to determine in what sense this ontological crisis is related to the crises which within a Reformed context, are considered to be of utmost religious, or spiritual, significance.

As we noted above, the issue of personhood finds its most pointed treatment by the conservative Reformed theologian in the doctrine of God's Call. Even though it would be highly unusual for the Call of God⁴ to begin with a close brush with physical death, the crisis with which it is precipitated is described as being equally

as serious. This is because, according to the conservatives, the Call begins when an unredeemed person, finding him/herself in the presence of the preached Word of God, is confronted with God's command to be in a way which is absolutely harmonious with God's holy law. Precisely because it is the Creator's law it is asserted that the very being of the person, i.e., the *creature*, is at stake. This is why it is believed that even a single transgression secures eternal disaster⁵, i.e., the actualisation of the law's "curse".⁶ Faced with this ultimate of all standards it is claimed that the called realise that who they are is not what they should be and that, unless there is a radical change in the situation, they fully deserve the punishment of eternal condemnation.⁷ It is in this sense that those who take such a conservative stance locate the definitive crisis of being human in God's Call. This is seen as the "beginning" of the single most important event of one's life where, via the preaching of the Word of God, as the proper means of Calling⁸, the unredeemed person's conscience, as it were, testifies to the complete depravity of human being which is not also Being-in-Christ. Hence, we can therefore see a correlation between the NDEr's *complete inability* to escape from his/her near-death context and the called's complete inability, his/her "depravity", to satisfy the requirements of God's law.⁹

In this situation it is believed that the unredeemed can not identify with Being-in-Christ but only with being-apart-from-God - only with being an enemy of God.¹⁰ Hence, the conservative position views all the unredeemed, in biblical terms, as slaves to

sin¹¹, hopelessly and continually transgressing God's law¹². To a great extent this too speaks directly to our understanding of the NDE crisis in terms of an Imperative of Vitality, for this notion of sin is closely aligned with the Augustinian concept of concupiscence, as the impotence-of-being which is grounded on self-love in contrast to the power-of-being which comes from existence grounded on love of God via the indwelling Spirit. Whether or not we can also compare the NDEr's crisis with a strictly conservative concept of sin, which lays the stress on self-centredness to the point of open rebellion towards God, is a question that remains to be answered. No matter which notion of sin is adopted both indicate that human being that is not orientated in a right relationship with God is human being cut off from its source of true life. According to the conservative view then, there is nothing about any hearer, at this stage, which could be identified with true (i.e., "spiritual") vitality¹³. Unredeemed being is simply being-unto-death.¹⁴

However, as a close brush with death becomes the ontologically significant crisis of the IV only if it can be correlated with the person's transmutation, so too it is believed that the preaching of God's Word becomes the definitive spiritual crisis of one's life only if it can also be correlated with the hearer's ontological transmutation. In the language of conservative Reformed theology, the external, or "general", Call becomes the event of the "effectual", or inner, Call only when, simultaneous to the hearing of the preached Word of God, God's Holy Spirit supernaturally changes that "central and all-controlling

organ of the soul", the hearer's "heart"¹⁵. It is this change of being as a spiritual event which enables the Called person to possess the justifying faith¹⁶, in the Word's witness and promises concerning Jesus Christ¹⁷, that they have attained Being-in-Christ. It is thus posited that the called's change of being as a spiritual change is vital to his/her "rescue". In much the same manner the NDEr's rescue is dependent upon his/her transmutation to a state of being in which he/she exists as "purely...mind, consciousness, or spirit", as indicated in the previous chapter. Thus, like a close brush with physical death, the preaching of God's Word can not be unequivocally associated with a extraordinary and definitive identity-crisis unless it is followed by an unequivocal, person re-forming rescue.

Here we find ourselves faced with one of the most contentious of theological issues in the form of a key question, Is the rescue-facilitating transmutation as arbitrary as it seems? The conservatives say "no". Those who are truly Called must escape from their crisis, as this is the way in which God brings to fulfilment God's sovereign election of the person from eternity, e.g.,

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸

For precisely the reason that God's Call is based on election it is vehemently maintained that it is an unconditional Call, that there is absolutely no difference in the spiritual status between the hearer

for whom this crisis becomes a true identity-crisis and the hearer for whom it does not, both exist in a state of being which is self- rather than God-centred.¹⁹ Because none of the research done on the NDE has been able to determine why the perception of imminent death becomes the NDE "crisis" for some though not for most who experience it, it also seems as if the NDE also represents unconditional phenomenon. Hence, it would not be unreasonable for us to theorise here that, like the Call of God, there may be a transcendent reality in relation to which the NDEr's rescue from his/her crisis is not an arbitrary phenomenon. However, until we deal with the transmutation in the next section let us venture no further than to state, quite in-line with our definition of the IV in the previous chapter, that the NDE's "purpose" also seems to be connected to the transcendence of the impotence of one's pre-crisis state of being, i.e., ones' self-sufficient-being-in-the-world.

We are now able to say that even though the awareness of coming close to physical death and the exposure to the preached Word of God can not be literally identified, they can be correlated in terms of their potential for becoming sufficient causes of an extraordinary identity-crisis, which leads to a dramatic rescue in the form of a profound change in one's very being. We have also seen that the nature of this crisis itself, in both cases, apparently cannot be separated from the fact that one's pre-crisis state-of-being is in great danger due to its lack of self-sufficient vitality. Since the precise nature of the "vitality" in question is more properly a matter of the

"transmutation" which follows the crisis, the real significance of our discussion in this section must remain within the context of the crisis event itself, as that which is unequivocally experienced as a threat to one's very existence, because it is inextricably linked with an experience which points beyond the boundaries of one's existence, i.e., the transmutation. In other words, the conservative would say that even though the preaching of God's Word is the means by which the elect are brought into fellowship with God, it does not actually become the event of conversion unless a "supernatural" catalysing factor is "added", i.e., the Holy Spirit. Noted above, as far as our research-based understanding of the NDE's etiology informs us, the experience of coming close to physical death is also not sufficient *in and of itself* to trigger an NDE. Can we say then that, just as it is, from a strictly conservative position, a supernatural catalysing factor which is added to the hearing of God's preached Word in order for it to facilitate the called's transmutation to Being-in-Christ, a supernatural catalysing factor must also be at work, in combination with the perception of coming close to death, in order for an NDE to take place? Indeed, along with our previous speculation that there might be some kind of transcendent reality which holds the key to the apparent arbitrary nature of the NDE, would we not take a substantial step forward toward understanding the true spiritual nature of the NDE if we could show that something akin to the Holy Spirit were at work "within" the NDEr? Inside of a conservative Reformed context these would indeed be viewed as critical issues, not just in the sense in which they

have already been presented, but on the more fundamental level that they are directly related to the conservative's distinctive conceptuality of God's Self-revelation. Here, to be more precise, we have come upon that most basic of Reformed doctrines, i.e., God's sovereignty, where God's Self-revelation, in combination with His special, irresistible grace, is itself believed to be the sole means by which a person can be "rescued" from their depraved state of being. Therefore, even though at this early stage in our exploration we have found a not insignificant level of similarity between the NDE and God's Call, we must proceed very cautiously. Although the nature of the NDEr's identity-crisis and the called's bear a striking resemblance to one another on a phenomenological and ontological level, the question of their theological relatedness is still quite an open question.

In fact, within the context of the crisis event itself and from the conservative perspective, it is virtually impossible to ignore the fact that the identity-crisis associated with the Call of God can be described as the "efficacious" identity-crisis only if it represents the sole instance of its kind within a person's life time. If we recall that our primary study population of NDErs included those who identified themselves as being Christians before their NDEs, we are faced with the situation in which, again, from the conservative viewpoint, these would have to have had two transforming identity-crises. Now since the doctrine of perseverance is an integral part of the conservative view, we are unable to argue that these Christians had actually fallen away from Christ previous to their NDEs,

therefore allowing for the possibility that their NDE crises could still represent conversions to Being-in-Christ. Some might respond to these facts by point out that it is not beyond the realm of possibility that all of our pre-NDE "Christians" were nominal Christians. Admittedly this could have been the case, yet it is highly improbable. Not only would this issue present a rather formidable obstacle for anyone interested in proving that the NDE and the Call of God are theologically identical (e.g., How does one know if a person is a "nominal Christian" or not?), but they would also have to deal with the conservative belief that the "proper means of calling" is God's preached Word. However, at this stage it should be noted that not all Christian theologians view God's Word as normative, especially in relation to the process of conversion to Being-in-Christ. For example, generally the Roman Catholic position views the role of the Church itself as being a critical aspect of God's Self-revelation to individuals²⁰, while, even within the ranks of arguably conservative Reformed theologians some would put a great deal of stress on God's Self-revelation via God's presence within the historical context of individual's lives.²¹ Yet, we can still say with certainty that, from a generalised conservative perspective it is highly significant that the NDE is not triggered by the preached Word of God. Again, some may find a loop-hole here too, for, in subordinating all to the inscrutability of God's sovereignty, some within the conservative circle do allow for exceptions to this principle, e.g.,

God does not always apply the two methods of calling possible to Himself (i.e., outward and

inward calling), but calls some to Him only by the inner light and leading of the Holy Spirit without the ministry of His Word. This method of calling is of course per se sufficient for salvation, but very rare, extraordinary and unknown to us.²²

This idea does seem to provide something of a solution to the problem concerning God's means of Calling and the NDE crisis, yet, again, to base one's argument for a theological identification of the NDEr's crisis and the called's crisis on the above provisos would certainly be highly problematic. Let us keep in mind that in dealing with God's Call we are involved with a doctrine which, perhaps more than any other within the conservative Reformed tradition, expresses concretely and comprehensively a tremendous reverence for God's sovereignty. Certainly the element of radical externality which the NDEr's crisis and the called's crisis have in common is largely dependent on this notion of God's sovereignty, but this also presupposes God's Self-alienation before the Call, for the elect as well as throughout the entire life-time for one who is not elect. Thus, to defend the above argument, that, in a conservative context, all NDEs manifest a point of contact between human being and God, we would have to reconcile this Self-alienation with the profound availability of the self-communicating NDE "God". Before we reach any conclusions on the matter though, and as planned, we will now shift our attention to a perspective undoubtedly more harmonious with the NDE God, Schleiermacher's liberal articulation of the Reformed faith.

In sharp contrast to the conservatives, that a single, definitive crisis event is necessary in order for an unredeemed person to become a Christian is a notion wholly incompatible with Schleiermacher's theological program, e.g.,

The idea that every Christian must be able to point to the very time and place of his conversion is...an arbitrary and presumptuous restriction of divine grace and can only cause confusion. In its most definite form it is found in the assertion...that every true Christian must be able to allege, as the beginning of his state of grace, a penitential crisis of soul, that is to say, a surging up of regret to the limit of despairing self-
abhorrence, followed by a feeling of divine grace reaching to the limit of inexpressible felicity....²³

Certainly, Schleiermacher would allow us to speak of instances where an individual's conversion could be described in terms approximating the identity-crisis associated with God's Call as described above²⁴ - these would not be considered normative though but simply expressions of particular individuals' experiences of their own conversions. Yet, Schleiermacher, again, in contrast to the conservative perspective, believes that such mountain-top conversion experiences are far more the exception rather than the rule when it comes to a person's transition to Being-in-Christ. To say that the Creator-creature relationship is itself not insignificantly influenced by the creature's finite-being-in-the-world and that "transcendental" experiences of God are, therefore, not a necessary touchstone for the presence of God within one's life would actually be quite an understatement of Schleiermacher's position.²⁵ This is why the difference in a person's own experience

between not-yet-Being-in-Christ and Being-in-Christ is invariably more subtle as expressed by Schleiermacher in comparison with that indicated by the conservative idea of God's Call, e.g.,

conversion cannot be distinguished either in and for itself, or by any particular mark, from the effects of preparatory grace. Only gradually can each consciousness reach certainty of itself, and its peace of heart becomes fixed...in accordance with the laws of organic nature the true life of Christ in us announces itself at first only in weak and intermittent impulses, and then gradually a unified activity emerges.²⁶

As our use of Schleiermacher progresses it should become clear in what sense this attitude towards conversion was seemingly not meant by Schleiermacher to be a negation of God's Self-revelation, but a reflection of a deep felt reverence for the sovereign God's eternal Will for all of creation as it unfolds in the "natural" course of events and lives. Indeed, it is unfortunate that in working out a theological system with the stated intention of rejecting any anthropomorphic reductions of God - with the desire to express a faith which saw the hand of God at work everywhere and in everything rather than in arbitrary "acts" which fill the gaps, as it were, of limited human understanding - Schleiermacher would become so widely, though in certain respects justifiably, accused of being pantheistic and of reducing theology to anthropology.²⁷ In his most developed form, as found in *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher sees the "divine omnipotence" in terms of the "divine causality" which "presents itself completely and exhaustively in the totality of finite being".²⁸ However, in true dialectical style, he also recognises

that "since divine omnipotence can only be conceived as eternal and omnipresent" it is unacceptable to say that anything comes into being in a particular moment in time through God's omnipotence, but that "through omnipotence everything is already posited which comes into existence through finite causes, in time and space".²⁹ Now we can begin to understand why the relegation of God's salvific Self-revelation to purely "supernatural", isolated "acts" (e.g., the event of Calling) is wholly unacceptable to Schleiermacher. It is along these lines that, in reference to Schleiermacher, the substantive question of our exploration may not be whether the NDE (including the NDE crisis) evidences God's special Self-revelation but whether God's Self-revelation is evidenced in a special way via the NDE.

Regardless of its anomalous character, the NDE crisis, in Schleiermacher's eyes, must remain a "natural" experience, like all meaningful moments, including those which are unambiguously spiritual or "religious". This means that there is really no conceptual room for describing the "catalyst", or "catalysing factor", of the NDE crisis in purely supernatural terms. Such a way of viewing the natural and the supernatural is ultimately based not on an understanding of causality itself but is an unavoidable development springing from the root of Schleiermacher's whole, theological endeavour, i.e., the belief that real, true faith in Christ as one's Redeemer is only ever founded on the experience of the redemptive influence of Jesus Christ within one's life.³⁰ This does not mean that God's preached Word is superfluous, as it is still only by "enter(ing) the sphere of His

historical influence"³¹ - the fellowship of those who already possess Being-in-Christ (i.e., the Christian Church) - that the influence of Christ is mediated to the unredeemed, primarily via "His spiritual presence in the Word"³² as it is preached.³³

Unlike the phenomenological, ontological and possibly even theological correlations that the conservative perspective has allowed us to make between God's self-revelatory act of bringing His elect into Being-in-Christ via His Call, we have quickly come to a point at which it might seem as though Schleiermacher disallows such associations with a person's redemption. If a person's moment of conversion to Being-in-Christ is utterly dependent upon the concurrent hearing of God's preached Word, certainly our investigation of the relationship between Schleiermacher's understanding of God's Call and the NDE has been precluded. However, things are not completely what they seem.

As we have just noted above, it is true that the salvific influence of Jesus Christ is grounded on the Church's proclamation of Him, however, in a more general sense, the influence of Christ also impacts all persons who have had any contact with the Church as it provides a living "witness" or "testimony" to Him as Redeemer³⁴. In this sense the unredeemed, even if they do not actually hear God's Word preached, can still be profoundly effected by "the common Spirit communicated...from the whole communion of Christians".³⁵ What we are getting at here is that the actual moment of one's conscious conversion need not take place simultaneous to the preaching of God's Word. This confirms what we alluded to above: although the hidden,

spiritual transmutation to Being-in-Christ itself (i.e., regeneration) is founded on Christ alone, it is not necessarily in connection with a magical moment of hearing Him preached that this comes to be. More commonly this transmutation is known only after it has taken place, as a person comes to the realisation that he/she has truly become a child of God through the total, cumulative influence of Jesus Christ in his/her life. Hence, the reasonableness of directly correlating the NDE crisis with the "natural" event of one's "conversion", as the moment in which the conscious "realisation" of the previously accomplished transmutation to Being-in-Christ takes place.

It is not clear though why, in the context of Schleiermacher's position, we should limit our comparison of the NDE crisis - as an identity-crisis where one's finite self-sufficient-being-in-the-world is abruptly challenged - to the event of a person's conversion to Being-in-Christ. It is true that such a connection fits in well with our previous observation that, within Schleiermacher's system, the NDE must remain a natural phenomenon. But, in point of fact, Schleiermacher's system allows for instances in which the centeredness of one's personal identity on its own self-sufficiency is dramatically threatened, where conversion to Being-in-Christ does not become an issue, although a "revelation" of God does.

According to Schleiermacher it is of the very structure of being human that a person always stands in relation to God no matter if he/she is in-Christ or not and that it is only through this relation that we can say a person's essential being is an existing reality.

As we saw above in relation to divine causality and again in terms of the influence of Christ via the community of Christians, Schleiermacher is quite insistent about the radical role a person's "world", or context, plays in both the disclosure and actualisation of his/her true, unqualified, essential self. It does not necessarily follow that Schleiermacher's is a monist perspective though, for it is only through the self-consciousness of his/her experiences of all that is "other" than the self (e.g., people, the physical environment, and ideas) that a person comes to experience his/her relationship to God as that which is completely different from all these relationships as well as the reflective self of objectifying perceptions (i.e. the Ego). Hence, Schleiermacher's understanding that a person's relationship with God is experienced as the unchanging "immediate self-consciousness", or "feeling", of "absolute dependence" which stands in dialectical opposition to the unity of his/her relative freedom and relative dependence regarding all that which is "other" making up his/her "context", or world. It is in this sense of absolute dependence that the "self" of the immediate self-consciousness is experienced as being externally posited, a "having-by-some-means-come-to-be". Not only does this mean that "God" is the Source, or "Whence", of the person's true, or essential, self, but that any moment of a person's life has the potential to become a religious experience (i.e., "revelation" of God) as a revelation of one's vital relationship to God.³⁶

Thus, the extent to which, in any moment, one's immediate self-consciousness of absolute dependence

(i.e., "higher self-consciousness"³⁷) becomes more determinative of one's self-consciousness than one's "sensible self-consciousness"³⁸ (i.e., that limited to one's relative freedom and relative dependence that makes up one's world) the more one will experience one's true, essential being. It would seem a good possibility then that, as an extraordinary identity-crisis in which one's finite self-sufficient-being-in-the-world is suddenly called into question, the NDE facilitates a sudden shift in the level of a person's determinant self-consciousness such that the "vitality of the higher self-consciousness"³⁹ is dramatically experienced. To put the same thing another way, there seems to be little difficulty with asserting that the NDE identity-crisis could trigger an "experience" which would be a manifestation of one's spiritual, or essential, state of being - i.e., relationship to God - no matter whether that were Being-in-Christ or not. We can move on from this section now understanding precisely why, in relation to Schleiermacher's liberal Reformed position, our analysis of the NDE as an IV need not be limited to the doctrine of conversion. It should also be plain in what sense Schleiermacher's position may be sympathetic to the "profound availability of the self-communicating NDE 'God'" where the conservative's is not.

In this section it has been shown that the ontological significance of the NDE's crisis can be theologically meaningful in at least two different ways within Reformed theology. In the cases where, with the conservatives, the ability to experience true (i.e. spiritual) vitality is made dependent on the supernatural Self-revelation of God, the NDE crisis

bears a striking resemblance to the efficacious hearing of God's preached Word in combination with the internal activity of the Holy Spirit. As the person-defining crisis of a life-time, the divine challenge to one's self-sufficient-being-in-the-world represents the beginning of that spiritual event in which the possession of true human being (i.e. the "rescue") becomes a possibility for the first time in a person's life. On the other hand, from within the confines of Schleiermacher's system, the theological meaning of the NDE crisis need not be limited to the start of the process of conversion, as all meaningful experiences of one's state of being carry with them the potential to be religiously significant as well. Here we are not forced to decide whether or not God is acting "supernaturally" to facilitate an individual's possession of true human being and true vitality, for even if the NDE does correspond to a profound disclosure of one's spiritual status (i.e. relationship with God) it may simply be the "natural" means by which this is facilitated. Thus, it is quite interesting to note at this stage 1) the rather pronounced nature of the ontological similarity yet theological dissimilarity between the NDE crisis and the crisis facilitated by the conservative's Call of God, in contrast to 2) the rather good possibility that the NDE crisis has for being theologically significant within Schleiermacher's system even though its ontological status within the same context is not nearly as unique as that it possesses within the conservative context.

3.0 The Transmutation

As we are well aware of now, one of the most mysterious aspects of the NDE is why only some and not all those who are confronted with what seems to be the threat of imminent physical death have an NDE. However, the nature of the NDE transmutation which follows the triggering crisis is itself no less perplexing, not just in relation to the manner in which the person is him/herself involved but also in regard to the dramatic change in being which takes place. The problem is related to the fact that such a change of being is something which has never been externally observed, while even the experiencers themselves struggle to understand and describe the precise character of this change. It seems particularly fitting then to begin our consideration of the NDE transmutation and Reformed theology by looking into how it might be related to the spiritual transmutation from unredeemed-being to Being-in-Christ known as "regeneration".

As one of the most celebrated references to regeneration in the New Testament, invariably all Reformed theologians would agree that John 3:3-9 serves here as a fitting introduction to the extraordinary character of regeneration itself,

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born

of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

Surely this last question posed by Nicodemus has stood at the centre of many a theological debate concerning the nature of a person's transmutation to Being-in-Christ. It would seem that the perplexing questions which the NDE transmutation has itself elicited in the last two decades, especially in terms of what it means to be a human being, remain largely unresolved because they are strongly suggestive of a similar kind of change. From a Reformed perspective, again like the NDE transmutation, at the root of regeneration's mysterious character is the difficulty with which it is perceived. In the passage above, Jesus actually likens one's attempts to discern this transmutation to the impossibility of discerning the point at which the wind begins to blow. Indeed, for the conservative Reformed theologian, the remarkable regeneration of one's very being, facilitated at the event of one's Calling, is essentially a hidden phenomenon.⁴⁰ In like manner the transmutation in the NDE is known by experients themselves only in a secondary sense, by its effects, i.e., experients' perceptions of various modification of themselves and their world after they have taken place. It is reasonable then to describe the NDEr's transmutation itself as taking place largely outside the experient's consciousness. As we are well aware, those persons in proximity to the NDEr's physical body are

unable to perceive even these effects. Due to its spiritual nature, the rebirth, or re-creation, of the called's being as Being-in-Christ is also neither consciously experienced nor is it directly observable by another person⁴¹. We will see in more detail in the next section that, again, like the NDEr's change of being, regeneration is disclosed to the called in relation to a number of its vitalising "effects". Although we have not answered Nicodemus' question we have begun to understand the nature of regeneration and how it is easily compared to the NDE transmutation on the basic level of its hiddenness regardless of the profound nature of what it actually brings about.

Continuing from the conservative perspective, a person's regeneration is a real possibility only because it represents a sovereign act of God; it takes place solely in accordance with God's eternal purpose and will to bring into being that which a human being is him/herself utterly incapable and undeserving of.⁴² A biblical passage cited quite often to support this idea is found in the Second Epistle to Timothy: "(God) has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time".⁴³ As in the first section, does this not remind us of the radical externality of the NDEr's own transmutation and the apparent randomness concerning to whom, when in a near-death context, let us say, it is "given"? Hence, along with their hiddenness, the next point of connectedness between the NDEr's and called's transmutations should be clear: corresponding to the NDEr's "innocence" in

effecting his/her own transmutation, God changes the hearer efficaciously⁴⁴ at that moment in time which He has ordained.⁴⁵

Schleiermacher's own understanding of regeneration is in-line with the conservative view presented thus far, up to a certain point that is. He too sees a person's new life, or "new birth", into Being-in-Christ as the "working of divine grace" such that the inner change is itself hidden.⁴⁶ This is why, as we saw above in relation to the crisis, Schleiermacher does not expect that all those who are redeemed will be able to point to the exact time and place when their regeneration took place⁴⁷, as it is typically recognised only after it has taken place, in rather more existential terms, as the definitive turning-point of their lives:

This new life of course presents itself as something in process of becoming, for the individual identity persists and the new life can only, as it were, be grafted on to the old. And yet the situation in which the new life is present as something as becoming, when related in memory to the situation in which it was not present at all, can be attached and bound together with the old into one continuous personal life only by assuming a turning-point at which the continuity of the old ceased, and that of the new began to be in progress of becoming. This is the essence of "regeneration".⁴⁸

Technically speaking then, and in accord with the mainstream conservative position, Schleiermacher does identify regeneration with a decisive event, even if the effected person was not aware of it as being such at that time. The real difference between Schleiermacher and the conservative perspective has to do with, once

again, the nature of God's Self-revelation itself. Even though Schleiermacher's regeneration is presented in such a way as to assert that it is also wholly dependent upon the notion of externality (i.e. God's grace), the conservative theologian finds it rather difficult to maintain the sovereignty of God here if this gracious act of God does not correspond to an event where the hearer's will is indisputably broken by God, and that in such a way that he/she is utterly aware of it at the moment when it takes place. Anything which suggests that the "new life" of the Christian is something other than completely given in regeneration is looked upon as, at best, a synergistic conception of regeneration. In fact the criticism of Schleiermacher's concept of regeneration often goes much deeper than this. It is a common criticism of Schleiermacher that his position is devoid of the real, Christological paradox of God become man in Jesus Christ, i.e., it assumes that there is an "indwelling aptitude for God in (every) man".⁴⁹ In other words it is believed by many that, Schleiermacher's fundamental problem was that he tragically overestimated the status of human being apart from Jesus Christ, failing to see that, by definition, human being is itself the problem. For the conservative, Reformed theologian, of themselves people are hopelessly given over to their alienation from God. This attitude is evidenced and expressed in countless ways throughout the writings of Karl Barth, e.g.,

In Jesus the communication of God begins with a rebuff, with the exposure of a vast chasm, with the clear revelation of a great stumbling block. 'Remove from the Christian Religion, as Christendom has done, its ability to shock, and Christianity, by becoming a direct communication, is altogether destroyed. It

then becomes a tiny superficial thing, capable neither of inflicting deep wounds nor of healing them; by discovering an unreal and merely human compassion, it forgets the qualitative distinction between man and God' (Kierkegaard)"⁵⁰

Yet, returning to the issue of regeneration and God's Self-revelation, Schleiermacher's appeal above to the "progress in becoming" must be seen in relation to the hiddenness of regeneration, in relation to its manifestation according to his, arguably, conception of God's "activity" in the process of sanctification.⁵¹ In fact he states quite categorically that regeneration is "explicable only by the redeeming activity of Christ".⁵² Thus when in reference to regeneration he uses language such as "present as something as becoming" he is referring to the existential "state of the union" between the person and Jesus Christ, in contrast to the actual "act of uniting" which takes place fully in regeneration.⁵³ In short, from Schleiermacher's position the possibility does seem to remain open for the NDE transmutation to be recognised, in hindsight, by some experiencers as their own regeneration. Of course this is a possibility as long as one takes a view of regeneration which does not make its occurrence dependent on the effected person's own "knowledge" of its having taken place when it actually has, an idea, as we have seen above, which itself is not inconsistent with the conservative perspective.

As offensive as even the possibility of identifying regeneration and the NDE may be to many - no doubt for the conservatives as well as not a few NDErs - it is still here, at this stage in our exploration, a

extremely remote, though logical, possibility. Again, this point reminds us of how Schleiermacher's commitment to the realities of human "experience" can, and have, bring him into conflict with those theological perspectives (e.g. the conservative Reformed) in which God's transcendence and the depravity of human being are stressed so much that God's availability and the positive value of human being are all but non-existent. It must be recognised though, that the dangers of neglecting God's transcendence, perhaps in Schleiermacher's case to the extreme of sacrificing what is theologically true for what is theologically meaningful for the individual, are no less serious than those of removing God altogether from the realm of human being. An example of this extreme can be detected in the rejection of any notion of regeneration in terms of lived-human-being:

It is true enough that in human existence this (i.e. the call of God as the "event of vocation") is reflected only in the most diverse disruption, division, differentiation and relativisation. But if we are to see what is here theologically and practically real, important and relevant, it is essential that we should understand the process of vocation as the work of the Jesus Christ who in it acts towards man. Hence we must not be led astray by considering the very dubious ways in which it is reflected in human existence....⁵⁴

The phrase from Schleiermacher's own point of view on this subject, as quoted above, which underlines the real want of meaning such observations carry must certainly be "for the individual identity persists". Have we not come to recognise that the nature of personal identity, and particularly the issue of its

continuity, can not be divorced from those topics having to do with a person's change of being. No matter whether it be the question of the survival of physical death or an unredeemed person's transmutation to Being-in-Christ, it is difficult to understand how any serious investigation of human-being, even from a theological perspective, can be conducted when the continuity of personal identity is considered a relatively irrelevant question. In his own treatment of the transmutation to Being-in-Christ Schleiermacher readily admits this point in its most controversial form, i.e., the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the freedom of human being:

All Christ's activity, then, proceeds from the being of God in Him. And we know no divine activity except that of creation, which includes that of preservation, or, conversely, that of preservation, which includes that of creation. So we shall have to regard Christ's activity too in the same way. We do not, however, exclude the soul of man from creation, in spite of the fact that the creation of such a free agent and the continued freedom of a being created in the context of a greater whole is something which we cannot expect to understand; all that we can do is to recognise the fact. The same is true of the creative activity of Christ, which is entirely concerned with the sphere of freedom. For His assumptive activity is a creative one, yet what it produces is altogether free.⁵⁵

It is not our intention to provide an "answer" to the problem of God's election and the individual's freedom, yet we should now state explicitly what has been assume throughout our discussion in this section: in the face of the radical, hidden and externally intentioned changes which the redeemed and NDErs undergo there is

nevertheless is believed to be a continuity of personal identity in both cases. Along with this certainty we might now also acknowledge the fact that makes this assertion, though held to be correct for both phenomenon, quite difficult to fully grasp, i.e., in both cases the change of being which takes place is itself instantaneous. Just as the NDE could not be what it is without the person's experience of "being 'in' their physical bodies one moment and inexplicably 'out' in the next" as a "re-thrown, disembodied being"⁵⁶, so too in that instant when the vitalising "power of the new life is implanted in the soul" a person is completely regenerated or "born again", i.e., either a person is or is not spiritually alive as a Being-in-Christ.⁵⁷

Even though we have seen that, in sharp contrast to Schleiermacher's, a purely conservative understanding of regeneration cannot be identified with the NDE transmutation without the person's consciousness of it taking place at that very moment when it is effected by God, it must be kept in mind here that the conservative also asserts that the only way of perceiving regeneration has to do with its vitalising effects, comprehensively evidenced in a person's conscious conversion to Being-in-Christ. Although the relation of conversion to the NDE's "disclosure" of the essential self will not be explored until we get to the next section, we must admit that at this stage the level at which they can or can not be correlated is as yet unclear. Thus, it is still quite possible that, at least on a ontological level, the conservative's regeneration and the NDE's transmutation might continue

to exhibit a rather surprising level of similarity as we proceed. Schleiermacher's own conceptuality of regeneration has, so far, shown itself to be quite amenable to even a positive theological comparison with the NDEr's transmutation of being. Thus, having already established that regeneration and the NDE transmutation are alike for both at the very least on a ontological level - in that they both represent externally intentioned, instantaneous, radical, and hidden changes of human being which, nonetheless, also involve a continuity of personal identity - we can now proceed by shifting the focus of our analysis from how these changes take place to what they actually entail.

Ultimately, within Reformed theology, regeneration entails the liberating, vivifying, and person-defining union of an unredeemed human being with Jesus Christ. Schleiermacher and the conservatives both assert that this re-creation to Being-in-Christ has to do with a person's liberation and the resultant vivification because it is founded on the hearer being, as it were, buried with Christ - pointing to the reality of being freed from the control of the old sinful nature⁵⁸ - and then resurrected with Him with a wholly new, spiritual life.⁵⁹ Just as Jesus' resurrected life is eternal and indestructible, death no longer has any power for those who are united with Him.⁶⁰ It is thus that the most significant ontological characteristic of regeneration has to do with Jesus Christ as the Mediator within the Creator-creature relationship⁶¹, i.e., *Unio cum Christo* or *Institio in Christum* as the spiritual union of the hearer with the resurrected, living Christ.⁶² The being of Jesus Christ becomes the energising power of the

regenerate's new being as well as the "pattern" to which it must continually be conformed.⁶³ Consequently, to a great extent the connection, or lack thereof, between what actually takes place during the NDE transmutation and regeneration, from a Reformed perspective, can be analysed according to two interrelated points:

- 1) The person's liberation from the "control of the sinful nature" through rebirth in Being-in-Christ, or union with Jesus Christ,
- 2) where this union itself holds the key to one's true vitality.

Let us begin our consideration of these two issues reviewing the basic points of the NDE transmutation explored in the previous chapter. In regard to our interpretation of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality we discovered that in many ways it facilitates a liberation of the experient from his/her "existential state of being" and thus his/her "existential self". We summarised many of our initial observations of this phenomenon in terms of the NDEr's existence as a "re-thrown, disembodied being". It was also seen how the "lack of potency, or vitality, of the finite, existential self" was attributed to its "self-centeredness", especially in terms of 1) NDErs' immediate interactions with other NDE entities and 2) various phenomenon making up the Life Review. Having explored these themes we were able to see precisely how the NDE reveals itself to be a negation of what was called the "opposition to the essential self", as the

"essential self" was disclosed during the NDE. In this sense it can be said that the NDE transmutation effects a liberating reorientation of an individual's personal identity, away from the centeredness on one's existential state of being to the energising centeredness on one's essential self. Hence, the degree of similarity between the NDE transmutation and regeneration depends on the extent to which we are prepared to liken a) the control of the sinful nature with centeredness on one's existential being and b) centeredness on Being-in-Christ with the centeredness on one's essential self.

To prepare ourselves for the consideration of point one above from a strictly conservative perspective, we need not go into great detail, having noted in the previous section how the "control of the sinful nature" is inseparable from the notion of a person's status as an enemy of God. As shown above as well, it is via the efficacious Call of God that regeneration effects the liberation of the hearer's life from the "control of the sinful nature" as one's person-defining service to sin - a service separating the person from God. This conception of regeneration, as the reversal of a person's absolute inability to serve God, is seen to be prefigured in the Old Testament where God's Call to judges and prophets enabled those previously incompetent to become His effective servants.⁶⁴ In other words, it is said to be impossible for one who is regenerate to have as the centre of his/her personal identity "service to sin" as apposed to service to God. To reiterate a now familiar conservative point, this means that until rebirth to Being-in-Christ takes place a person stands

in a depraved state-of-being, or in bondage to his/her own impotent self-sufficiency as God's enemy.

Focusing our attention back to the NDE transmutation, we now need to ask ourselves, What is the relationship between the concept of a person being an enemy of God and the NDE concept of a person's centeredness on his/her existential being. In the first place, there can be no doubt that both the conservative's regeneration and the NDE transmutation represent phenomenon in which a self-centred existential self no longer controls, or defines, one's state of being. In this sense the regenerate's self-defining new spirit of service to and love towards God can be compared to many NDErs' feelings of detachment and disregard concerning 1) their physical bodies; 2) their pre-NDE spatio-temporal and social "world"; 3) "returning"; and, for some, 4) "returning" to loved ones. On a more fundamental level the NDEr's transmuted being is itself defined according to the experient's rescue from a situation in which his/her existential self-sufficiency was revealed to be illusory, just as the redeemed, for the conservatives, are negatively defined according to their rescue from a state of being in which there existed no power to overcome the self-serving service to sin. And, just as it is asserted by the conservative, Reformed theologian that once regenerate it is impossible for a person to revert to a state of being *defined* by service to sin, the NDE transmutation itself "removes" the experient so completely from his/her existential being and is so externally intentioned that, at least during the NDE itself, it is impossible for the individual to effect

his/her own reversion to existential-self-centeredness. Yet, we must also recognise, as we did in the previous section, that the NDEr's liberation from his/her existential self-dependence may indeed end up being only a pale version of the conservative's regeneration as liberation from one's active rebellion against God.

As for the correlation between the NDEr's centeredness on his/her essential self and the conservative's understanding of a regenerate person's centeredness on Being-in-Christ, there can be no question of whether or not the Christian's essential self can be identified with "centeredness on Being-in-Christ", as this is the foundation of the Reformed concept of regeneration. The real question is whether the NDE transmutation is also such that the NDEr's essential self becomes grounded on Jesus Christ. Because this is an issue pertaining to what is actually "disclosed" during the NDE itself, we will not address it here, even though we should be able to anticipate our final answer by dealing with point two. This will have to wait though, for we still have to deal with the NDE transmutation in its relation to the particularities of Schleiermacher's own concept of what takes place during regeneration.

Regardless of his highly liberal, psychologised position, Schleiermacher does speak of the pre-regenerate "control of the sinful nature" as "alienation from God". Schleiermacher even asserts that the responsibility for this state of affairs has to do with "an action originating in ourselves"⁶⁵ which he concedes, in-line with the conservatives, can be properly described as a "turning away from the Creator".⁶⁶ Yet in

language much more representative of his experiential approach, he also says that true "fellowship with God" is dependent upon one's "God-consciousness" (i.e., one's higher self-consciousness) becoming the governing reality of one's very existence. Before regeneration a person's "God-consciousness" had been "repressed", determining his/her existence only in a "feeble" manner⁶⁷ "due to the independence of the sensuous functions"⁶⁸. Recalling our discussion of Schleiermacher's description of the structure of human being in the previous section, this reference to the "sensuous functions"⁶⁹ speaks of a pre-regeneration centeredness of self-consciousness on one's own *immediate context*, or sensual world, i.e., one's "world-consciousness"⁷⁰. The control of the sinful nature represents then that existential state of being Schleiermacher calls "Godlessness" or "God-forgetfulness", an "imprisonment or constraint of the feeling of absolute dependence".⁷¹ Therefore, regeneration means that a person's God-consciousness, in becoming the determinant centre of a his/her existence, is "in a position to take constant control of the various elements of (his/her) life" such that he/she comes to possess a "life that is new".⁷² Thus, in the end, the spiritual birth which is regeneration is possible only because of the "person-forming"⁷³ union with Jesus Christ, where Jesus' "absolutely powerful God-consciousness"⁷⁴ liberates a person's God-consciousness from its suppression via one's world-consciousness, effecting the forgiveness of his/her pre-regeneration sins and making sure that "sin can never win fresh ground"⁷⁵.

Schleiermacher's own concept of regeneration, especially in relation to his idea of sin, allows us to make a rather remarkable connection between it and the NDE transmutation. From a negative perspective, the fundamental point of contact can be described in terms of the NDEr's estrangement, as liberation, from his/her materially-grounded context and the regenerate's liberation from his/her world-consciousness as the determinate of his/her existence. Positively, regeneration ended this domination via Christ's communication to the person of His own powerful God-consciousness such that, in union with Christ, this becomes the redeemed's own dominating, and thus vitalising, God-consciousness. This concept is obviously intimately related to the idea that Being-in-Christ is characterised by the redeemed's possession of the "mind of Christ".⁷⁶ Hence, through this person-forming phenomenon the redeemed's existence becomes centred on his/her essential self, which, ultimately means, being centred on the "Whence" which the "immediate self-consciousness" of "absolute dependence" (i.e. God-consciousness) attributes to one's essential self as a "having-by-some-means-come-to-be". Is this not what our interpretation of the NDE as an experience of life and not death - as an IV - also posits, that the NDE represents a person's unplanned home-coming in the form of the self-conscious' domination by its own utter dependence, or givenness, on some "external", transcendent reality for the existence of its essential being? Clearly Schleiermacher's idea of the world-consciousness as the determinant of one's existence (i.e., the control of the sinful nature) represents

virtually the same phenomenon as the NDE's "centeredness on one's existential being".

With his stress on Christian "experience", that the redeemed's essential self is equated with his/her centeredness on Being-in-Christ can hardly be doubted - the regenerate's essential self is ground on the being of Jesus Christ precisely because the essential self is that which is experienced as a "given" through one's God-consciousness, and, according to Schleiermacher, the Christian's God-consciousness is mediated only by the presence of Jesus Christ as the power of His own God-consciousness. In this case, just as above with the conservatives, the question remains open though whether the NDEr's centeredness on his/her "essential self" is also equivalent to "centeredness on Being-in-Christ". As was mentioned above, perhaps the following consideration of our second point will shed some much needed light on this and other issues that have been raised in our discussion of the first point.

That union with Christ, as regeneration, "holds the key to one's true vitality" is true enough from both the conservatives' outlook and Schleiermacher's, yet the point on which they differ here, as above, will prove itself to be critical for our investigation of the NDE as an IV within a religious context which is Reformed. In light of the conservative assessment of unredeemed human being as spiritual impotence to the point of actually being spiritually dead, it necessarily follows that possession of true, eternal life is only possible when God re-creates a person such that the very core of his/her existence is not only directed towards but united with its true Source (i.e., God).⁷⁷ Indeed, the

conservative correlation between being a "slave to sin" and one's self-centeredness as such spiritual deadness was described in our treatment of the NDE crisis above, as was the biblically based concept of regeneration regarding unification with the resurrected life of Jesus. The contrast between one's vitality before and after regeneration is therefore absolute; a person goes from being "dead" to being in possession of the fullness of life via his/her union with the risen Jesus Christ.

It is true that regeneration does represent for Schleiermacher the impartation of Jesus' "God-consciousness" to a person as the "new vital principle" of one's being, so that "the former personality may be slain". In this way a constantly determinant God-consciousness is linked to the "vital fellowship with Christ", enabling one's existence to be lived in terms of the "higher life".⁷⁸ Schleiermacher even goes so far as to say that "calling proper can be regarded as soul-bestowal".⁷⁹ However, even for the unredeemed the "vitality of the higher self-consciousness" - which is the same as the vitality associated with this higher life - is never "at zero", but is only obstructed or arrested so that, because it is intimately connected to one's God's consciousness, it simply does not "dominate the moment".⁸⁰

In contrast to the conservatives' notion of sin then, where sin so defines an unregenerate person that his/her being is hopelessly cut off from the vitalising relationship with God through Christ, Schleiermacher's is actually best understood, in his own words, as simply "a derangement of human nature".⁸¹ Here, of course, is another fundamental difference between the conservatives

and Schleiermacher. The conservatives, as we have seen above, see sin in terms of God's justice and the need for propitiation via the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is claimed that in giving human experience, rather than the Bible, the normative role in understanding the true nature of redeemed and unredeemed human being, Schleiermacher has undermined the concept of sin by undermining the "nature and sanctions of the divine law, as well as the holy anger of God."⁸² As already mentioned, this difference between these Reformed perspectives will prove to be a major factor as our exploration of the NDE continues.

Although, at this stage, we can not say whether or not the vitality of the essential self is dependent on all NDErs' essential selves being somehow grounded on a unification with Jesus Christ, we can at least address this second point on a phenomenological level, recognising, and further exploring, the close correlation between the NDE's "essential self" and the redeemed's state of being in terms of his/her union with Jesus Christ. In this context we need not hesitate, stating quite confidently in the first instance that the NDE essential self is that upon which the NDEr's true vitality is grounded. From the very beginning of our investigation, in terms of the NDE types in chapter three, we adopted the term "essential self" for the express purpose of being able to speak of the experient's continued existence, especially his/her consciousness and activity, beyond the point at which this could not, for many of them, be detected in any externally observable fashion by another person. It is thus that we came to interpret the NDEr's "separate

self" as this essential self, that which, in relation to the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality, we have also differentiated from the person's "existential self". Although some may see it as an insult to their intelligence or, conversely, nothing but a tautology, what we are saying is that the "essential self" of the NDE represents the essence of one's being. In line with what we found in chapter four, the essential self is therefore quite compatible with, though not necessarily identical to, both the Cartesian and Platonic notions of the "soul". It is for all these reasons that the essential self of the NDE transmutation is believed to be the same as the regenerate's Being-in-Christ to the extent that it is that which "holds the key to one's true vitality".

In relation to our second point then we can say that the vitality associated with the NDE transmutation can be correlated with both of the Reformed positions, though in different ways. To the extent that the NDEr's essential self represents a continuation of his/her previous vitality (e.g., "consciousness and activity") the NDE transmutation's vitality is more readily correlated with the new-life-in-Christ presented by Schleiermacher, for both speak of the liberation and subsequent dominance of the life which was already present though severely stifled. On the other hand, the conservative conception of regeneration is more readily correlated with the vitality of the NDE essential self where the connection is made between the new-life-in-Christ as a type of vitality never before possessed and the ineffable difference between what the NDEr experiences as his/her essential self and what was

experienced in the context of his/her pre-NDE (existential) state of being. We might even go so far as to say that this comparison with the conservative position reflects the fact that, like those who refuse to interpret the NDE in a reductionistic manner, conservative Reformed theologians refuse to see the truly Called (i.e. regenerated) as anything but absolutely new creatures.

Before we conclude this section, let us briefly consider one more characteristic of the NDE vitality itself. From both Reformed perspectives a person's ability to love God is made dependent on his/her possession of a special kind of vitality, i.e., the "spiritual" vitality which comes with regeneration.⁸³ When viewed from a less utilitarian or penal perspective, it is said that the conservative's regeneration is appropriately prefigured in the Old Testament as the eschatological renewal⁸⁴ of God's chosen people, e.g., "I (God) will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh."⁸⁵ Here the regenerate's new life is conceptualised in the highest expression of human being when it is also Being-in-Christ: the steadfast love of God. This passage also reminds us that via the mediation of Jesus Christ regeneration has to do with the reception of a "new spirit", that it is itself first and foremost a "spiritual" reformation of one's being. In relative agreement with the conservatives, Schleiermacher also says that only after human beings are placed "in Christ" can they truly love God, as they "come to a knowledge of the divine love" for the first time.⁸⁶ As an ultimate of

ultimates, a phenomenon inextricably related to God, the regenerate's vitality is thus claimed to be a "spiritual" reality.

Now, what is particularly noteworthy here is that regardless of whether they are "religious" or not, it seems as though NDErs, as well as the NDE researchers, find it virtually impossible to speak of the NDE without referring to "spiritual" matters. This is even evidenced by the reductionists. Our treatment of the NDE in chapter six revealed that no matter whether it is in pharmacological, psychological or physiological terms, the reductionists' explanations of the NDE's "pathology" invariably centre on attempts to account for the NDE as a "spiritual" phenomenon. In our own phenomenological treatment of the NDE in the previous chapter the NDE transmutation was described throughout in reference to the words "spirit" or "spiritual". In reality, it takes very little knowledge of the serious research which has been done on the NDE to-date, no matter from which perspective it has been undertaken, or even what conclusions were reached, for one to see that this is not merely a matter of semantics. It is believed that the primary reason why the NDE is so connected with things spiritual - beyond the brute "fact" of the NDEr's putative disembodied state and encounter with other "spiritual" being and realms - is its comprehensive relevance to the vital principal of the experient's essential being as that which is grounded on a Higher Power external to itself. The whole of our phenomenological interpretation of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality has demonstrated this. Certainly there are few Christian theologians who would

not immediately agree that, generally, "spiritual" means in-relation-to-God, especially God as the Creator and Sustainer of human being. In biblical terms many of these would no doubt turn for support to Genesis 2:7, where the vitality of human being is described as originating from the Spirit, or breath, of God. Similarly, not just Reformed theologians, but most from within the Christian circle, would see as straightforward the idea that any division in the Creator-creator relationship brings with it a corresponding reduction in the true vitality of human being.⁸⁷ It is in this context that true human vitality is understood to be a "spiritual" issue. Indeed this has been presupposed throughout our present investigation: one's re-birth (i.e. regeneration) can only take place, for both the conservatives and Schleiermacher, via union with Jesus Christ at the core of one's being. In this sense there is a remarkable correspondence between the spiritual nature of the NDE transmutation and the reception of "a new spirit" in regeneration. Yet, just how far the vitality of the NDEr's essential self can be correlated with that which is directly related to the love of God, possessed by those who have experienced the transition to Being-in-Christ, is still an open question.

We have come a long way in this section, finding that, phenomenologically, the NDE transmutation and the fundamental Reformed notion of regeneration both represent an externally intentioned, hidden, and vitalising change to a person's very being without destroying the continuity of his/her personal identity. More specifically we can now say that, generally, the

relationship between the NDEr's transmutation and regeneration supports the most notable, though tentative, observations which we made at the end of the previous section. As we saw with the crisis, in contrast to Schleiermacher's position there exists a remarkable ontological, yet improbable theological, similarity between the NDE transmutation and the conservative's regeneration in terms of the radically new level of vitality which the NDEr and the called acquire, respectively. On the other hand, in contrast to the conservative perspective, we have seen what almost looks to be an identification between 1) a person's liberation from the control of their pre-regeneration sinful nature regarding Schleiermacher's idea of a dominating consciousness-of-the-world and 2) the experient's liberation from his/her pre-NDE centeredness on his/her existential being. Now, that this truly represents a theological correlation is debatable, as it is grounded on Schleiermacher's highly ontological interpretation of sin. It is also significant that from both of the Reformed perspectives the redeemed's liberation to centeredness on Being-in-Christ was recognised as the same ontological reality as the experient's liberating centeredness on the essential self, while the far more substantive question of how one might relate this essential self to Jesus Christ was left to be considered in the next section on conversion, as it was in the previous section as well. All of these observations support our previous findings that, within the context of Schleiermacher's system, as a profound ontological experience, the NDE may or may not represent a Christian, religious experience. In contrast,

although we have already seen in these first two sections that, regardless of the undeniably high level of ontological similarity between the NDE and the Call of God, our investigation in the next section of conversion *per se* will no doubt confirm our findings to this point, that the NDE would not be considered theological significant in terms of the Call of God for the conservative Reformed theologian. Yet, in both cases, our final judgement can not be made until we take into consideration the NDE-specific after-effects in our final section below.

4.0 The Disclosure

In this section we will explore the relationship between the conscious experiences of the NDEr during the NDE event and the experiences regarding the following two phenomena: 1) the redeemed's conversion to Being-in-Christ as the personal manifestation of his/her regeneration, and 2) the emergence of Schleiermacher's "God-consciousness" within the self-consciousness for the redeemed and unredeemed alike. From one perspective we will therefore be going back to rejoin our subjects where we left them in the first section, experiencing an identity-crisis in the face of a threat to their self-sufficient-being-in-the-world. We pick up the action in the first moments of their "rescue", i.e., Christian "conversion". In ontological terms conversion can be conceptualised as the shift, or reorientation, of an individual's personal identity from his/her pre-regenerate state of being to Being-in-Christ. Given this understanding, conversion need not actually

correspond to, as we have called it above, a mountain-top experiences. Thus, regarding Schleiermacher's perspective, our discussion of conversion itself is also relevant for those whose conscious transition to Being-in-Christ is not precipitated by an "extraordinary identity-crisis". In fact, the fundamental issue to be explored in this section has to do with the relationship between the awareness of God's Self-revelation (e.g., as the primary manifestation of one's regenerated being) and the disclosure of the NDEr's transmuted, essential self via his/her conscious experiences during the NDE event itself.

We begin here, taking into account both of the Reformed perspectives, by focusing our attention on what is typically designated as the initial manifestation of true regeneration, i.e., repentance. Even from a purely linguistic perspective we can immediately see the relevance of this concept to the disclosure of the NDEr's transmuted state of being, as the word "metanoein" (i.e., the Greek root for repentance as found in the New Testament) means to change one's mind. In specifically theological language repentance is the simultaneous turning towards God and, with a sense of deep regret for one's sin, turn away from the spiritually dead "*sinful self*".⁸⁸ As Schleiermacher puts it, in the moment of one's conversion "Christ awakens a wholly perfect regret just in so far as His self-imparting perfection meets us in all its truth" - the redeemed must actually "abjure utterly" their "previous condition".⁸⁹ In harmony with that foundational of all Reformed doctrines, the sovereignty of God, repentance is itself grounded on God's grace; in his/her "turn",

formally, the hearer of God's Word is said to be passive. The key to understanding how it can be said that a person is passive in his/her act of turning is that the "act" itself is said to be a spontaneous manifestation of one's newly given, regenerate state of being. Hence, from the conservative perspective, it is asserted that repentance is a possibility only for those in whom God has replaced the will's domination by sin - its "natural anti-God" disposition - with righteousness.⁹⁰ As we will see in detail below, for Schleiermacher the purely passive act of repentance follows automatically from the "living receptivity" for Jesus' "influence" which, at the actual moment of conversion, is "already present."⁹¹

We have already indicated in the previous section one way in which the phenomenological connection might be conceptualised here: it is relatively common for the NDEr to experience feelings of detachment and disregard for his/her existential self and its context, from which he/she has, "innocently", been separated, e.g., concerning 1) their physical bodies; 2) their pre-NDE spatio-temporal and social world; 3) returning; and, for some, 4) returning to loved ones. To this we might add that for some there is also a notable level of critical self-judgement in terms of one's pre-NDE life in regard to the NDE life review, yet in many cases the life review is found to serve more of pedagogical and/or comforting function. We might also see a positive correlation, which is even subtly theological, in those instances where NDErs feel surprised and even humbled by the way in which they are unconditionally accepted and loved by the NDE "God". It would seem that this does

evidence an approximation to an attitude of regret in relation to the experient's pre-NDE state of being. To the extent that, in comparison with God, we can speak of a transcendent Reality of the NDE itself, as the Source of the NDEr's transmutation, repentance might also be positively correlated to most NDErs' desire to remain in direct contact with this Reality, i.e., to remain in their new NDE context, or "world". Although such a comparison is probably only acceptable on an ontological level, at least on these terms there can be no question that experients have shifted their identity away from their former state of being and towards the external Ground of their transmuted, essential self. In fact, all of the NDE phenomena noted here demonstrate, albeit in varying degrees, that within the consciousness life of the individual, this shift in the centre of personal identity has taken place. What is conspicuously lacking though is the element of regret as the dominant affective concomitant, without which repentance is not truly repentance.

Here, for the first time, we find that the negative NDE must be phenomenologically differentiated from the stereo-typical, positive NDE, as an overwhelming feeling easily associated with "regret" is practically definitive for negative NDErs. Unlike positive NDErs, negative NDErs are not willingly drawn into the NDE "world", for theirs is ominous. Significantly, the negative NDEr's "turn" away from the existential self is grounded not on escaping from it by not "returning" to it, but, it would seem, on the desire to return in order to change the manner in which it manifests the essential self. In further contrast to the positive NDE, that

portrait of the pre-transmutation (i.e., pre-NDE) existential self which the negative NDEr's conscious experiences paint, corresponds extremely well to the notion of one's sinfulness specifically in moral terms, even to the extent, in harmony with the conservative perspective, of being an enemy of God. As we saw in chapter five, most negative NDErs return feeling betrayed by religious institutions for not doing more to make it known that there is a hell, i.e., a place where people are *punished for their sins*. In fact, we also learned that it is very common for the negative NDE to convert a person to a "strict Bible-based Christianity"⁹², which, as is the case within the Reformed tradition, would in most cases view repentance as a critical aspect of conversion. But here we have gotten ahead of ourselves, bringing into our discussion NDE after-effects. Let us back track, reserving our investigation of the negative NDE for later, taking a closer look at what is at the root of the Reformed conception of conversion itself and what this means to our analysis of the positive NDE.

Thus far we have focused on the "turn" of repentance in comparison to the NDEr's own experiences, in which a similar shift in personal identity may be detected. The attendant affective state of regret, critical to repentance, is seen to be largely missing from the positive NDE, even though it does seem to be an important aspect of the negative NDE. In both of the previous sections we have also noted the critical role which the notion of sin plays in coming to a proper understanding of the ontological meaning to be found in the theologically doctrine of conversion to Being-in-

Christ. What ties all this together is the idea that not only is the actual transmutation to Being-in-Christ dependent on the grace of God, but so is the redeemed's awareness of this transformation in terms of a proper understanding of one's pre- and post-regenerate states of being. Hence the *change of one's mind* which is integral to repentance, and ultimately faith, is absolutely dependent upon the grace of God enlightening a person's mind to the darkness of his/her spiritual deadness, or "Godlessness", while, at the same time, opening and arousing in the heart an earnest desire for redemption.⁹³ We shall now proceed by taking a closer look at precisely why the element of regret *per se* is not a part of the positive NDEr's conscious shift in personal identity during the NDE itself, thus also addressing the issue of his/her pre-NDE state of being in relation to the regenerate's enlightenment to their own pre-conversion "spiritual deadness". This should lead us into our analysis of the regenerate's conscious conversion in terms of the "desire for redemption" and faith in Christ as Redeemer.

Many from the conservative camp would undoubtedly say that within Schleiermacher's system the notion of a "proper self-understanding" is given far too much significance, virtually making it the grounds for conversion itself.⁹⁴ The follow passage from his treatment of Jesus Christ's uniqueness in regard to conversion is indicative of Schleiermacher's stance:

Hence those who remained unbelieving were not blamed because they had not let themselves be persuaded by reasons, but simply because of their lack of self-knowledge, which must always be the explanation when the Redeemer is truly and correctly presented and people show themselves unable to recognise Him as such.⁹⁵

This passage not only evidences well the grounds of the conservative's critique but also reminds us of the Reformed connection between conversion and the need for exposure to the preached Word of God. Here we should note well that, even if the "self-knowledge" of repentance's regret is not given such a fundamental role in conversion itself, it nevertheless is a crucial element in coming to a proper understanding of the Reformed position of true human being as Being-in-Christ. Calvin thought this concept so important that he chose to present it in the first two sections of his *Institutes*. These are entitled, "Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God" and "Without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self".⁹⁶

Now the knowledge of self which the positive NDE as an Imperative of Vitality provides is, no doubt, based on a vivifying transmutation of one's being, as the "escape" from the existential self's lack of self-sufficient-vitality. The conscious experiences of the positive NDE do not typically show the NDE "crisis" to be an indictment of the pre-NDE state of being in terms of the person's failure to live in harmony with any (let alone a divine) moral code or, more pointedly, failure to love and serve God specifically. The self-understanding which the disclosure of the essential self during the positive NDE does usually produce is that, one's pre-NDE existential self fell short of its true potential for vitality because one had not properly attended to, and learned to develop, one's own unique being. We can not help but to hear anew those climacteric phrases which issue so often from NDE

"natives" just before the experient "returns", e.g., "It's not your time yet", "What have you done with your life?", and "Are you prepared to die?" It is quite in keeping with our interpretation of the NDE as an IV to here recognize that the regret of repentance, though theological quite different from, can be phenomenologically compared to any disappointment the positive NDEr feels for not having lived his/her life more "authentically", for not realising his/her unique purpose in each moment of his/her unique life. Within the positive NDE this is found in various place, e.g., in the interactions with the NDE "God", during the life review, and as some NDErs' reason for wanting to return. It must be acknowledged though, that the feeling of disappointment is most likely to be experienced when the experient realizes that he/she will have to return to an existential state of being. This is quite interesting, for this is one of the most commonly reported, and in many cases the only, "negative" affective dispositions within the positive NDE. Does this not suggest that, like the redeemed, the positive NDEr does indeed have a great desire to turn away from his/her pre-transmutation state of being? Clearly, the question remains as to what extent we can compare the positive NDEr's experiences during the disclosure of his/her transmuted being with the disclosure of the regenerate's transmuted being regarding his/her *desire for redemption* and satisfaction of that desire through *faith in Jesus Christ as one's Redeemer*.

We have seen above that from a conservative position, the called's awareness of his/her need for redemption relied on the perception that one was a slave

to sin and that this meant existence as being-apart-from-God as an enemy of God. For Schleiermacher this was expressed in terms of a person's awakening to the fact of their "Godlessness" or "God-forgetfulness", in the sense that instead of one's God-consciousness being determinant of one's existence one's sensually based world-consciousness was. In our discussion of both of these perspectives in the previous section, we reached an understanding of regeneration along the lines of the control of the sinful nature and how, in this state, a person is believed to possess little if nothing of what is believed to be true vitality, i.e., spiritual life through Being-in-Christ. Now, in relation to the conscious experiences of those placed in Christ by means of regeneration, Schleiermacher, along with the conservatives, asserts that it is through a graciously enlightened understanding of God's Word that a person comes to the full knowledge of this, their defective state of being outside of fellowship with God.⁹⁷ Likewise, a true desire for redemption comes into being when, because of the person's regenerate heart and mind, union with Jesus Christ is desired for the first time.⁹⁸ The regret-filled turn away from the sinful self is thus paired with the hope-filled and trusting turn towards Jesus as one's Redeemer in faith.⁹⁹ Thus it is that, as we discussed in the previous section, regeneration is categorically manifest via the individual's conscious conversion. Does this approximate to the positive NDEr's experience during his/her NDE? For example, can the experient's disappointment at having to return to his/her existential state of being, or for that matter, any aspect of the NDE, be correlated to the redeemed's

desire to be unified, in faith, with Jesus Christ as his/her Redeemer?

A fruitful way of approaching an answer to this question would be to begin with a consideration of the ways in which the positive NDEr's conscious experiences relate to redemption generally and then proceed with an assessment of these observation in relation to the redeemed's re-orientation to Being-in-Christ specifically. Thus, in the first place, let us acknowledge that, from the individual's point of view, it is asserted that the phenomena of desiring redemption and finding Jesus as the Redeemer are both grounded on the enlightening experience of God working in one's life.¹⁰⁰ In other words, these two specific phenomena, representing a person's inauguration into fellowship with God, are said to be based on an individual's intimate "contact" with the Ultimate Source of all that exists, which is, as it were, outside, or external to, the individual him/herself.¹⁰¹ Our interpretation of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality has strongly suggested that the "authoritative exhortation"¹⁰² which echoes throughout the NDE has its source "outside" of the experient him/herself as well. A possible correlation with God does not end here though, for the NDE as an IV also lends itself to the idea that this source is critical to the person's ability to live in a manner in which his/her unique, essential being will be realised. Actually, it would be difficult to prove that the NDE as an IV does not presuppose these two points - in our analysis above we have already spoken of the "transcendent Reality of the NDE itself" and the "external Ground" of the transmuted, essential self.

Therefore, let us now focus our attention on the primary ways in which the positive NDEr's actual experiences during his/her NDE correspond to experiences which, it is asserted, the redeemed themselves have.

From the start of the positive NDE the individual experiences a dramatically new state of being. For instance, as we have noted above already, there is for most experiencers an immediate and absolute shift in concern - a "detachment" - from their own, earthly lives to one for a whole new form of existence in the NDE realm. This can be easily compared to the shift in identity which is the biblical ideal for those who have become converted to Jesus Christ, as the following passage indicates:

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.¹⁰³

However, for the converted, such a conscious reorientation carries with it the paradoxical experience of peace and joy in the negation of one's own self, as it evidences the fact that his/her emerging "new self" is being set free from both the sin corrupted self and the "world" due exclusively to union with Christ.¹⁰⁴ This deep peace and joy in self-negation reminds us of the ineffable peace and well-being experienced by the vast majority of positive NDErs, especially in relation to the notable increase of this affective state in the darkness/void. Supporting the concept of the NDE as an IV, in the previous chapter this place was seen to be characterised by an amplification of the positive NDEr's

former vitality attributable to the completed liberation from the individual's existential self, society and world.

If such an increased vivification was grounded for the positive NDER only in self-negation the favourable ontological comparison with the Christian's vitality, which points to an external Source of new life, would be rather difficult to maintain. This is not the case though, for, as we know, self-negation typically gives way to communion in a number of ways. Usually this begins when experiencers are drawn out of either their physical environment or darkness/void realm and into the special, "living" NDE light. It has been shown that, invariably, positive NDER's not only seem to instinctively know that this NDE light - often described as a being - is the Source of all life, but that, upon immediate contact with it, usually encounter pure, unconditional love and/or fullness of knowledge. In the previous chapter we made much of the observation that such encounters with the special NDE light and, similarly, the NDE presence, can readily be interpreted as mutually exclusive revelations of a supreme Being/Force, even to the extent that the positive NDER comes to understand his/her dependence upon "God" for the very existence of his/her being.

Our final example highlights the way in which the positive NDER's experiences during his/her NDE can be compared to the communal nature of the redeemed's experience of God. In this instance we turn to the NDER's experience of the transcendent otherworldly setting, as this is where there exists right relationships between all "things" and their essential

natures, as well as between each single thing and the others which make up its "context". In relation to the NDE as an IV, this heaven-like realm was actually identified as the proper context, or home, of the essential self, given the overwhelming sense of universal brotherhood, to the point of the absolute rejection of estrangement and alienation, which entry here stimulates. We can see why it is especially here, in this ultra-luminous otherworldly realm, that experiencers' encounters with other spiritual beings are an integral part of their appropriation of their new identity in terms of the essential self.

There is little difficulty in imagining how this experience represents virtually an ontological equivalent to the redeemed person's introduction into the Body of Christ, the "invisible" Church as the "society" which manifest, within each redeemed person's life, God's plan for absolute, eternal existence with Jesus.¹⁰⁵ Here, it is believed, is where the redeemed find much of their strength and support as God's children, building one another up within the an ultra vital fellowship of Christ's Spirit.¹⁰⁶ This, in biblical language, is the "kingdom of light"¹⁰⁷ - the "kingdom of the Son" which the called have been brought to following their rescue from the "dominion of darkness"¹⁰⁸ - the spiritual Kingdom of God which breaks into, and through, the redeemed's lives¹⁰⁹. According to Calvin, the new members of this community have come to a place where there is no death, only "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"¹¹⁰, i.e., pure vitality.¹¹¹ In comparison to the utter rejection of alienation experienced within the NDE, Christians are

not only Called to live in peace within this their now native, essential community, but are commanded to extend God's Kingdom by extending their God given love to all.¹¹² And, not unlike the positive NDEr who typically only gets a glimpse of the transcendent otherworld realm as an eschatological reality, it is asserted that the called too already have a taste of the Kingdom of God, yet truly remain Called to it as the consummation of their inheritance which lies in their future.¹¹³

The question we must now return to is, To what extent can the experient's consciousness of, and obvious dependence upon, the grounding Reality behind all his/her experiences during the NDE be equated with the regenerate's desire for redemption and faith in Jesus Christ? Essentially this is the exact same question which was left unresolved in both of the previous two sections. In its most pointed form then it is the question, Is the Ground of the essential self Jesus Christ? Our examples above have shown that the positive NDEr does seem to enjoy certain experiences quite similar to what those undergoing conversion, from a Reformed's perspective, will experience. This might be summarised as a simultaneous "negation" of one's pre-transmuted being and its context and appropriation of one's vitalising "replacements" as given by the transcendent Source of all that exists. The redeemed's appropriation of his/her new state of being as a child of God, or member of the invisible Church and subject of the Kingdom of God, is not possible without the conscious desire for such redemption and conscious exercise of faith that this new state of being has been secured through the mediation of Jesus Christ. In

contrast, the positive NDEr is simply aware of the absolute givenness of his/her essential self and its transcendent "context"; the participation in these vitalising, self-defining realities is dependent neither upon a conscious change of will nor a conscious trust in a mediating element/factor. Of course it is true that some positive NDErs encounter what they describe as "Jesus", but do the NDE entities which are associated with Jesus Christ really play the same role as the Jesus of the Reformed notion of conversion to Being-in-Christ?

To answer this question we should recall, in the first place, our findings that, in terms of weighted means, only 49% of all positive NDErs encounter either the special NDE Presence or some other visualised non-physical being during the course of their NDE, while, of these, only 40% experience the special NDE light. Obviously then, at least half of all positive NDEr's do not even have an encounter with an NDE entity, as a *distinctive personality*, to whom the existence of his/her essential self and its context might be attributed. In those studies where any detailed information was given regarding these experients' identification of the NDE natives that were experienced, encounters with "Jesus Christ" *per se* were mentioned relatively rarely.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, those few who do speak of an encounter with Jesus during their NDEs virtually never describe it as the occasion of their conversion to Being-in-Christ. It is true that the positive NDEr's encounter with the NDE "God" does tend to lead to vitalising experiences, described in terms of "love" and "knowledge", yet both before and after these specific NDE phenomena the individual exists as an

"essential self" without such "fellowship". In other words, encounters with the NDE "God" do not produce that state of being which we have seen is ontologically comparable to Being-in-Christ, they merely serve to further reveal its inherent capacity for vitality. If we had the desire to prove that the NDE does actually represent conversion to Being-in-Christ we could proceed at this point by arguing that the external Ground of the NDE is itself Jesus Christ as a salvific "Christ" principle. Such a line of reasoning might possibly be maintained, as mentioned above, along the lines of Tillich's notion of God as the "Ground of Being" or Rahner's concept of the "Anonymous Christian". However, such soteriological perspectives are largely incompatible with the conservative Reformed perspective, as they arguably are in relation to Schleiermacher as well, as we will see below. We can conclude then that, from a Reformed perspective, even though the disclosure of the positive NDEr's essential self is ontologically similar to the disclosure of the regenerate's new Being-in-Christ in a number of ways, it seems highly unlikely that the Ground of the essential self is Jesus Christ. Hence, again, the reorientation of the positive NDEr's identity from his/her existential state of being to that experienced during the NDE is not dependent on his/her trust and/or commitment to any mediating factor/reality, rather, it would seem to be based on an immediate experience of the transcendent Reality which not only grounds its new "context" but lies at the centre of the vitalising "essential self" itself.

Alluded to above, our exploration of the essential self's disclosure during the NDE is not yet complete.

In the first place, we still need to see the extent to which the rather positive correlation between the redeemed's conscious conversion and the disclosure of the negative NDEr's essential self - in relation to the regret-filled "turn" in repentance and the negative NDE's affective state - can be maintained in the context of the redeemed's exercise of faith. Secondly, even though the disclosure of the positive NDEr's essential self can not be positively correlated on a theological level with the disclosure of the redeemed's Being-in-Christ, the question does remain whether or not this disclosure of the essential self is in any way theologically relevant within a Reformed context.

Let us begin with the conservative point of view. It can easily be said that there are actually no grounds on which one could positively correlate, beyond what has already been discussed in the first two sections, the disclosure of the negative NDEr's essential self during the NDE event and the redeemed's exercise of faith in Jesus Christ during his/her conversion for the following two reasons: 1) as was the case for the positive NDEr, the negative NDEr's possession of his/her essential self and "existence" in the NDE "world" is not dependent upon a conscious change of will or trust in some mediating factor, and 2) as far as the research data indicates, Jesus Christ is never encountered during a negative NDE.¹¹⁵ Consistently shown above, if there is no unambiguous, supernatural revelation of Jesus Christ within a person's conscious experience it is impossible for him/her to even come close to exercising the justifying faith in Jesus as one's Redeemer. In reference to the second issue still

to be explored, we can also say that there can be little doubt that, from the same conservative point of view, the person-defining disclosure itself of both the positive and negative NDErs' "essential self", if not grounded on regeneration via Being-in-Christ, can be nothing more than either a theologically meaningless hallucination of some sort, or, especially in relation to the positive NDEr, a deceptive vision of the inherent goodness of human being apart from Jesus Christ (i.e., in Biblical terms, a trick of the devil¹¹⁶).

Because of his conceptuality of the manner in which human beings are related to God Schleiermacher allows for the unredeemed - along with the redeemed - to have genuine, meaningful, and theologically significant experiences of God. In fact, we have already noted in the previous sections Schleiermacher's idea that all moments have the potential to manifest the degree to which one's relationship to God has, or has not, been appropriated. What this means is that the door is open for us to push forward in our exploration of the ways in which the disclosure of the NDEr's (both positive and negative) essential self during the NDE event can be further analysed.

In both sections one and two above we have reviewed the manner in which Schleiermacher described the fundamental structure of human being as an essentially "religious" being. He designated the condition of the unredeemed as "God-forgetfulness", where the vitality of the "higher self-consciousness", or "God-consciousness", remains largely obstructed or stifled due to the domination of the individual's "sensible self-consciousness", or "world-consciousness". Yet we have

also found that it would be false to say that an unredeemed person's God-consciousness, or "feeling of absolute dependence", never becomes a part of his/her conscious experience. Thus, even before conversion one's God-consciousness may very well be "evince(d)...in isolated flashes".¹¹⁷ In reality, even the redeemed's growth, or "development", in Being-in-Christ "proceeds intermittently through widely separated moments of exceptional illumination and stimulation".¹¹⁸ Now the key to understanding what counts as such significant religious moments, in which the individual's God-consciousness becomes, compared to the previous moment, relatively more determinant of one's existence, has to do, again, with experiences of the "feeling", or "immediate self-consciousness", of absolute dependence. To grasp what this means precisely we need to take an even closer look at Schleiermacher's description of the fundamental structure of human being than we already have in various places above.

In the first place, when one's self-consciousness is dominated by one's finite relationships within the world (i.e., one's world-consciousness) one's personal identity will be centred on the "antithesis" of one's "pain" and "pleasure".¹¹⁹ In traditional theological terms this is the carnal life, or the life lived according to the flesh.¹²⁰ Now, as was noted in the first section, because the God-consciousness is that which stands in opposition to the unity of one's relative freedom and relative dependence regarding everything which is "other" than one's self - making up the individual's context, or "world" - the God-consciousness is "quite simple", remaining "self-

identical" at the same time that "all other states", determined by one's world, are in flux.¹²¹ Nevertheless, because being conscious necessarily involves being conscious of one's world in one way or another, it is impossible for a person to have an immediate self-consciousness (i.e., feeling) of absolute dependence in and of itself:

It is impossible for anyone to be in some moments exclusively conscious of his relations within the realm of the antithesis (of pleasure and pain), and in other moments of his absolute dependence in itself and in a general way; for it is as a person determined for this moment in a particular manner within the realm of the antithesis that he is conscious of his absolute dependence. This relatedness of the sensibly determined to the higher self-consciousness in the unity of the moment is the consummating point of the self-consciousness.¹²²

Technically speaking then, since the feeling of absolute dependence, or "higher self-consciousness", is itself not derived from the world-consciousness it therefore does not itself split into an antithesis like the world-consciousness. Yet, because it is only manifest in conjunction with one's consciousness of one's world it is indeed experienced, in the "unity of the moment", in terms of an antithesis of "joy" and "sorrow"¹²³:

we often find, united in the same moment (as a clear sign that the two grades are not fused into each other or neutralized by each other so as to become a third) a sorrow of the lower and a joy of the higher self-consciousness; as, e.g., whenever with a feeling of suffering there is combined a trust in God. But the antithesis attaches to the higher self-consciousness, because it is the nature of the latter to become temporal, to manifest itself in time, by entering into relation with the

sensible self-consciousness so as to
constitute a moment.¹²⁴

Before resuming our exploration of the NDE disclosure itself, we have only to bring these observations together with the fundamental connection which was made between Schleiermacher's system and the NDE in the first section. What is directly experienced in the feeling of absolute dependence is not God *per se*, but the "immediate presence" of one's "whole undivided Being". This consciousness of one's essential self is not the same as an objective "representation of oneself...mediated by self-contemplation" such as "self-approval" or "self-reproach". This is a pre-thought and pre-action awareness which, though it does accompany one's thoughts and actions, can also persist "unaltered during a series of diverse acts of thinking and willing, taking up no relation to these, and thus not being in the proper sense even an accompaniment of them."¹²⁵ Hence, the "immediate self-consciousness" (i.e., "feeling") of which one's God-consciousness is comprised represents the *immediate presence* of one's self, the self which has not been constructed or conditioned by relationships to the finite world. As was noted in section one, this is the essential self, it is who one fundamentally is as posited, as "having-by-some-means-come-to-be", i.e., one's whole, unified existence. It is for this reason that the feeling of absolute dependence is described by Schleiermacher not just as the higher self-consciousness but also as God-consciousness, for one cannot have an awareness of the essential self without having an awareness that its existence is absolutely dependent on an external "cause"

- a cause which cannot be identified with anything belonging to the finite world in which one's *existential self*, the self of objective self-representation, belongs. Therefore, in those moments - either as the unredeemed's "isolated flashes" or the redeemed's "moments of exceptional illumination and stimulation" - in which one truly experiences the "joy" or "sorrow" of the God-consciousness, Schleiermacher believes that one will experience God as the Whence of one's underived, externally given essential self. Now we are ready to look more closely at what the disclosure of the essential self within the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality has to tell us (within Schleiermacher's system).

It should become immediately evident that there is a distinctive affinity between Schleiermacher's concept of the essential structure of human being and the NDE as an IV as soon as we recall our description of the NDE as a "kind of archetypal 'return' or home-coming". This was partially based on our assessment of NDErs' conscious experience of being "involuntarily posited" as they became immediately aware of themselves as "separated" from their "physical bodies, spatio-temporal environment, and earthly society". In more ontological terms this was seen as a shift in the experient's "locus of personal identity", having to do with the transcendence of his/her "physically grounded self and its context", i.e., the experient's "world and society". Casting a glance back to Schleiermacher, must we not say that this is highly suggestive of a case in which one's world-consciousness no longer is determinant of one's self-consciousness. What is perhaps the most crucial factor in what seems

here to be an excellent example of Schleiermacher's own ontological analysis of human being, is the reality that, as an essential self, NDErs do indeed find themselves to be defined by their totally dependent state of being. By now we should be well aware of the various ways this is manifest during the NDE, e.g., via experiences of the NDE "God" (represented by the special NDE [being of] light and the special NDE Presence), the simultaneous enlightenment and assessment ["on God's terms"] intrinsic to the life review, the fact that all the NDE "natives" possess a complete knowledge of the experient's "spiritual" state-of-being, and the return of the experient even against his/her own wishes. Paradoxically, even though both the positive and negative NDEr find that they themselves have no control "over what, where, when, how, and why NDE world 'events' take place", they still feel somehow "at home". It is particularly difficult to make sense of this NDE fact in relation to negative NDErs. Yet, within the context of Schleiermacher's system we may actually be able to reach a certain level of understanding of this phenomenon. Indeed, if the NDE does represent a "moment" in which one's God-consciousness becomes stimulated, where not only the essential self but one's "Whence" is profoundly manifest in one's consciousness, then we should also be able to account for the more general fact that NDEs are invariably either extremely positive or extremely negative, i.e., of joy or sorrow.

Again we recognise Schleiermacher's assertion that all experiences have the potential to stimulate, or momentarily awaken, one's God-consciousness.¹²⁶ The actual character of the God-consciousness, in terms of

whether it is experienced as joy or misery, is not dependent though on whether the "sensible determination" which awakens it is "pleasant" or "unpleasant", but if its actual emergence is experienced as being "with ease" or "with difficulty".¹²⁷ One of the major points in our investigation of the NDE crisis above was that, in the context of Schleiermacher's system, the NDE would have to be considered a "natural" event, which, nevertheless, still had the potential to become religiously meaningful. Our investigation of the NDE etiology suggested that, because the NDE is triggered by the *perception* that one's physical death is imminent, the experient's own state of consciousness plays a key role at least in triggering the NDE. As one's God-consciousness, or higher self-consciousness, itself represents a level of self-consciousness it would not be unreasonable to say that the NDE is the evidence that a dramatic change in the level of one's consciousness, which coming close to death facilitates for some people, is a particularly effective means of evoking or encouraging the appearance of the higher self-consciousness. Such an understanding of the NDE's "cause" might also offer an explanation concerning the variation among NDErs in terms of the length and depth of their experience: whether a person experiences only autoscopic, transcendent or combined NDE phenomena will be dependent upon both the unique nature of his/her own self-consciousness as well as the length of time which it is dominated by the feeling of absolute dependence. Thus, in agreement with the research, we would not expect that all NDErs will be core-experiencers (i.e.,

an experient who has had either a transcendent or a combined NDE).

This line of reasoning actually provides us with one possible way of accounting for all three outcomes of a perceived close brush with death. This can be stated in the following way. As every person is unique, and the stimulation of the God-consciousness must be a "natural" phenomenon, there can only be three possible outcomes to the perception of one's imminent physical death: 1) there will be no change in the level of one's God-consciousness (i.e., non-NDErs), 2) one's God-consciousness will emerge "with ease" (i.e., positive NDErs), or 3) one's God-consciousness will emerge "with difficulty" (negative NDErs). This theory actually harmonises extremely well not only with our interpretation of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality but with the (theologically) important, research-based facts as well, e.g., when the higher self-consciousness "emerges with ease...this means an easy progress of that higher life and bears...the stamp of joy", yet "whenever it emerges with difficulty, this approximates to an absence of it, and can only be felt as an inhibition of the higher life". As this "inhibition of the higher life" stands in antithesis to joy it is experienced as "misery" or "sorrow".¹²⁸ So, from within the context of Schleiermacher's system, we are able to construct a non-reductive and reasonable explanation of why some people have NDEs and some do not when confronted with what seems to be one's imminent death. This same conceptualisation further gives some sense as to why the NDE is necessarily either an extremely positive or an extremely negative affective experience. Would it be

too optimistic of us if we were, to a certain extent, also able to spy here a possible way of discerning between Christian and non-Christian NDEs?

Even if it is true that the NDE represents a stimulation of one's God-consciousness, we know from our previous consideration of Schleiermacher's position that such stimulations do not necessarily have to lead to an individual's immediate conversion. Nowhere is this more clear than in those cases where, even when "Jesus" is encountered during a positive NDE there is no confession of Him as one's Redeemer. As a matter of fact, in relation to a strictly Christian, Reformed understanding of conversion, we have already noted in this section that the negative NDE seems to be more immediately significant; the negative NDEr does appear to possess something approximating to the regret of repentance. If we return to a more detailed account of our "three possible outcomes" to the perception of imminent physical death these observations should make more sense.

In the case of the first option, it is reasonable to assert that, owing to the "natural" facts of the situation and one's own disposition, we can rationally say that non-NDErs (i.e., those who do not experience a change in the level of their God-consciousness) will be made up of the redeemed as well as the unredeemed. That this is in fact the case is beyond question.

In relation to the second group, those for whom the perception of imminent death does facilitate a dramatic change in consciousness, the joy that is generated by the facile emergence of the God-consciousness suggests that this group is made up of both the redeemed and the

unredeemed. Thus, these would represent all our positive NDErs. On the one hand then we would have our Christian, positive NDErs, those for whom the NDE represented one of those moments of exceptional illumination and stimulation. It would be from this group that encounters with Jesus would be expected, yet, in accord with the facts, not in terms of a conversion experience, since these individuals are already converted, but in terms of an intense disclosure of one's essential self as it has been appropriated via Being-in-Christ. Our positive NDErs would also be made up of non-Christians, those for whom, in "isolated flashes" only, a facile emergence of the God-conscious produces the same kind of joyful affective state of being, yet no encounter with Jesus would be expected here, for these individuals have not had their essential self transformed by Being-in-Christ - their God-consciousness is not mediated by Jesus Christ. In theory then, we can see why when Jesus is encountered during a positive NDE it is not described as a conversion experience, and why the non-Christian, positive NDErs experience no regret or desire for redemption as theirs is a joyful experience of an easily emergent God-consciousness.

Again, holding to the line of reasoning we have pursued thus far, one might readily argue that the profile of those belonging to the third group fits almost perfectly with the available research data and our interpretation of the NDE. If encounters with Jesus during the NDE indicate that the NDErs having these experiences must all already be Christians, then it stands to reason that since none of those belonging to

the third group (i.e., negative NDErs) ever report meeting Jesus that it just may be that none of those who have had negative NDErs have been Christians. Is this not what we might have anticipated, given that, even though the development of the redeemed's God-consciousness takes place in an intermittent fashion, as one whose existence is defined by Being-in-Christ it (i.e., the God-consciousness) should probably never emerge with such difficulty as to elicit the feeling, or immediate consciousness, that one is utterly abandoned by God. Besides for the negative NDEr's general affective state described as a form of "incarceration", his/her conscious experiences of malignant NDE natives and experience of settings often described as "hell" certainly also supports this notion that the negative NDE represents an experience of one's God-consciousness from the negative pole of what Schleiermacher calls an antithesis of joy and misery. Perhaps the most convincing support for this particular understanding of the NDE within the context of Schleiermacher's system, is that it would be wholly contradictory to assert that the redeemed can have negative NDEs since, as the research shows, negative NDEs tend to convert those having them to Jesus Christ.

We can bring this section to an end now by directly addressing the two issues with which this final analysis of the NDEr's disclosure, in relation to Schleiermacher, was begun. In response to the question of just how similar the negative NDEr's disposition in relation to the disclosure of his/her essential self during the NDE, may be to the regenerate's exercise of faith, in relation to the disclosure of his/her new being as

Being-in-Christ, it has been theorised that it is actually the absence of Jesus Christ and the feeling of utter abandonment in a context in which one is totally helpless and dependent that indeed stimulates a desire for "redemption". As we indicated in the previous chapter, the NDE can be likened to a home-coming, even if, unlike what the "prodigal son" of the New Testament experienced, the negative NDEr feels that he/she is not welcome. The obvious question one will ask next is, what, if Jesus is not encountered during the negative NDE, is it that recommends Jesus as the negative NDEr's choice of Redeemer?

In the light of the great importance Schleiermacher gives to the role one's "context", or world, plays in shaping one's existence, the only real choice here is to say, as indicated in section one, that this evidences the "total, cumulative influence of Jesus Christ" in the individual's life up to his/her NDE. That is to say, because our study population is made up almost exclusively of those living within a cultural context in which Christianity is predominant, the pre-NDE influence of Jesus Christ, via the Christian Church, upon a person's self-consciousness during the NDE would be dominant. If Schleiermacher were here at this moment, he would undoubtedly remind us that we are not appealing to some metaphysical, salvific Christ-principle.¹²⁹ This influence of Jesus Christ comes through the community of those who already possess Being-in-Christ, this, he might add, is why non-Western NDErs do not encounter Jesus during their NDEs but religious figures from the religious communities which are predominant in their own cultural contexts.¹³⁰ We might add, the fact that the

negative NDErs' conversions to Being-in-Christ are not based on a mountain-top experience of Jesus Christ Himself also corresponds well with Schleiermacher's notion of conversion as presented throughout this chapter.

What are we to make of the second question, Can the disclosure of the NDEr's essential self be in any way theologically significant within the context of Schleiermacher's perspective given our observation above that Jesus Christ does not seem to be the "Ground" of the essential self? We have just given a positive answer to this question in relation to the negative NDE. Another point just made above is relevant to our question as well; it is theoretically possible that those positive NDEs who encounter Jesus, or even the special NDE light interpreted as being Jesus Christ after the NDE, are already Christians, thus accounting for the edifying yet non-converting tenor of these encounters. This hypothesis will be more fully explored in our final section below concerning the NDE after-effects. We have only now to consider what theological meaning may be found, within the context of Schleiermacher's system, for positive NDErs who have not had an experience of Jesus during the disclosure of their essential self.

In the course of our considerations above we have come to the realization that it is rather unlikely that the positive NDE event itself could be equated with either Schleiermacher's concept of conversion or regeneration. In the case of the former, given all that we have contemplated up to this point, there should be no difficulty understanding why this is the case. For

the latter we need only recall that, it is rather inconceivable that such an intense "religious" experience as the NDE would only in hindsight be recognised as the beginning of one's new status as a Being-in-Christ, especially if there were also no concomitant exposure to Jesus at the time. However, there is one more possible way in which the positive NDEr's conscious experiences of his/her essential self might be conceived as theologically significant for Schleiermacher: the workings of God's "preparatory grace"¹³¹.

The grace which is said to prepare an individual for his/her conversion to Being-in-Christ has to do with one's "receptiveness" to Jesus Christ as Redeemer. Without "a creative production in us of the will to assume Him into ourselves"¹³², conversion will never take place, for it is impossible for a person to be redeemed by Jesus against his/her will.¹³³ Inextricably linked to such a receptivity for the influence of Jesus Christ is, again, the individual's self-understanding, since it is only after a person has come to the realisation of his/her need for redemption that the Redeemer is even relevant. It is for this reason that Schleiermacher's concept of "preparatory grace" can not be divorced from an individual's dawning awareness that his/her intermittently experienced higher self-consciousness (i.e. God-consciousness) is where one's personal identity should be centred, rather than on one's world-consciousness. We have found this to be the case even for positive NDErs. Hence, we described this phenomenon along the lines of their consciousness of needing to shift their personal identity from centeredness on their

existential self to centeredness on their essential self. Nevertheless, as Schleiermacher points out, "the recognition of such a condition undeniably finds a place in all religious communions"¹³⁴. The real question then is whether this sinful state of being, this "derangement" of human being, comes to be felt as something personally unacceptable to the extent that, as is unique to Christianity (according to Schleiermacher), it also becomes *the most critical aspect of one's state of being*.¹³⁵ Therefore we must ask, To what degree can the non-Christian, positive NDEr's realization for the need to centre his/her personal identity on the essential self be correlated with the "consciousness of sin as something to be overcome" as the determinant "principle" of his/her very being¹³⁶? Only in our exploration of the NDE after-effects below will we be able to address this, Schleiermacher's, theologically significant question.

As we had anticipated, our exploration in this section of the NDEr's conscious experiences during the NDE event, as the disclosure of his/her transmuted being, has proven to be extremely decisive within our exploration of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality. In fact, we have reached several important conclusions to issues which had been given detailed consideration in the previous two sections. From a Reformed, especially conservative, point of view, it can now be said that the NDE event does not represent conversion to Being-in-Christ as there is little theological room for maintaining that that which grounds the NDEr's essential self is in fact Jesus Christ. Even though the positive NDEr does experience a shift in personal identity away

from his/her pre-NDE existential self and towards the transcendent, vitalising Ground of his/her essential self and its (NDE) context, this falls theologically short of the redeemed's shift in personal identity described in terms of the conscious change of one's will along the lines of the (moral) regret of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the Mediator of one's new being. Hence, regardless of even the negative NDEr's approximation to Christian repentance, within a strictly conservative context the bottom line has become that the "disclosure of the essential self" is either a theologically meaningless hallucination or a theologically significant deception attributable to the influence of the Devil.

In contrast, it has been found that Schleiermacher's system, in allowing for experiences of God by the unredeemed which are theologically significant even if not immediately connected to conversion to Being-in-Christ, has enabled us to conceptualise a rather convincing model in which the disclosure of the essential self may be seen as "religiously" significant. Thus, by linking experiences of God (or, God's Self-revelation) with either extremely pleasant or unpleasant affective states of being facilitated by the emergence of the God-consciousness, it has been proposed that there is a high probability that the negative NDE, as well as a moderate possibility that the positive NDE (for pre-NDE non-Christians), can be understood in terms of the workings of God's preparatory grace. However, before we move on to our final section it is important to again note some primary criticisms of that aspect of Schleiermacher's system

which has enabled us to formulate such a complete theory as to the NDE's theological significance within the context of his theological system. Fundamentally, it has been repeatedly asserted that, with his identification of consciousness and being Schleiermacher has made an individual's salvation a totally subjective matter and, further, that by making the need for a "renovation of (an individual's) life" primary he has made "reconciliation" with God simply a means to this end.¹³⁷ As one conservative theologian sees it, because Schleiermacher grounds everything on one's conscious experience his concept of regeneration, and thus conversion, does not pivot on an individual's possession of new being at all but is bounded simply by "variations" of the "potentialities of the consciousness" which the unredeemed has possessed from birth.¹³⁸ That such arguments highlight the weakness inherent in Schleiermacher's system is not doubted, though there are many who would respond by pointing out the external givenness of Schleiermacher's "essential being" as well as the strengths of a system which attempts to remain true to the lived experience of God in one's life. Yet, it is not our goal to determine the validity of Schleiermacher's, or for that matter the conservative's, theological point of view. What we have been, and are, interested in is exploring the NDE as an IV within these systems as expressed by their proponents, though recognising that such basic criticisms help us to better understand the precise nature of our investigation. Hence, we will continue now, recalling that the key question which still needs to be addressed in relation to Schleiermacher's point of

view is whether or not the NDE leads to a self-understanding in which one's very existence is defined by the consciousness of being in great need of redemption, i.e., whether the NDE can be correlated with Schleiermacher's conceptualisation of the workings of God's preparatory grace.

5.0 The After-Effects

Given our findings thus far, in this section our overall aim is to see both how similar the NDE after-effects are to the "after-effects" of conversion to Being-in-Christ in a conservative context and what, beyond even an ontological and/or phenomenological point of view, theological significance the NDE after-effects might have both in terms of the negative NDEr's conversion to Being-in-Christ and the working of preparatory grace (especially for positive NDErs). Let us begin then by briefly reviewing the conclusions we reached in chapter five regarding the NDE after-effects.

In the first place, we found that, by in large, it is those NDE after-effects which are least influenced by the experient's own decision making process that are both NDE-specific and unambiguous. These are "given" phenomena, i.e., they happen to NDEr's though no known "activity" on their own part, in contrast to consciously "chosen" changes in attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours. However, it also became clear that these two types of after-effects cannot be absolutely separated. In this sense it was seen that some chosen after-effects become unambiguous and NDE-specific if they are sufficiently grounded on given after-effects,

especially if the conceptual change(s) in question directly corresponds with phenomena from the NDE content as well (e.g. decreased death anxiety and increased belief in life after death). On the other hand, sometimes the given after-effects are manifest in a relatively ambiguous way, due to the experient's unique efforts to reach a satisfying personal understanding, expression, and/or development of the phenomena. This is evidenced quite well regarding the unpredictable change in NDErs' religiosity compared to the profound "spiritual" phenomena which are invariably described as being given. We also saw that there were a few other chosen after-effects which, regardless of being reported by non-NDErs too, find expression in such a unique manner among NDErs (i.e. in terms of their depth, or quality) that they also appear to be NDE-specific. Examining these we noted the clear influence of both the given after-effects and the NDE contents. Representative of this type is what was described as the NDEr's "quest" to understand the nature of his/her very existence.

Now, going right to the heart of the matter, during our analysis of the NDE after-effects within a Reformed context we must not lose sight of our findings that, as continuing manifestations of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality, the after-effects for the positive NDEr relating to religiosity are themselves unpredictable. Even though following their NDEs most experients are significantly more likely than non-NDErs to report an increase in what has been called an "inner spiritual awareness", it has also been found that, across the board, NDEr's feel that formal religious affiliations

are not needed to mediate and/or develop this new-found awareness of the transcendent Reality grounding one's self and world. At the same time, it has also been found that for a great many NDErs what does distinguish their "chosen", life-affirming changes in values, beliefs and behaviours, which are also reported by non-NDErs, is the integration of these on a "spiritual" level. What this means is that, in order to pursue the realisation of their NDE revealed "essential self" within the context of their existential lives, some positive NDErs will become more involved in their pre-NDE religious communities, some will leave theirs and join other religious/spiritual communities, while still others will join such organisations for the first time or opt-out altogether from any such groups. This confirms our findings above, that 1) within a conservative Reformed context it would be virtually impossible to argue that the (positive) NDE is somehow a mysterious Call of God leading to Being-in-Christ, and 2) the positive NDE could be, for some people, seen as manifestations of God's "preparatory grace", as presented by Schleiermacher. Yet, again, as our primary goal in this chapter is to fully explore all aspects of the NDE from within a Reformed setting, we will still take a much closer look at the precise relationship between the NDE and the conservative position, along with our further consideration of the NDE as an IV in the context of Schleiermacher's system.

As alluded to above, even within a conservative context, conversion to Being-in-Christ is indeed an eschatological reality: the redeemed are "already" saved in-Christ although they have "not yet" come to the full

realisation of this state of being, e.g., they have yet to absolutely freed from the power of sin, which is part and parcel of existing as a human being within a "fallen" world.¹³⁹ In other words, it is asserted that there is an *indicative* and an *imperative* necessarily associated with conversion to Being-in-Christ. Thus, in one sense conversion manifests one's regeneration as "an instantaneous change of man's nature, affecting at once the whole man, intellectually, emotionally, and morally."¹⁴⁰ In essence it is posited that this is a change of one's "being"; the "very penetralia of a man, the ultimate distinction between him and other men, and between him and other objects", in biblical terms the individual's "soul".¹⁴¹ On the other hand, it is also believed that this "indicative" is only such in that one's new self is a matter of faith; the redeemed's "identity is invisible" because his/her confidence in existing as a Being-in-Christ is always "hoped for", given that the "whence of the new identity is...the faithfulness of God" in attaching one to Jesus Christ.¹⁴² Turning our attention to the positive NDE we have concluded that, in terms of the only "chosen" NDE after-effects which were found to be unambiguous and NDE-specific, the experient's significantly increased belief in life after death and decreased death anxiety also point to a similar ontological reality. As a being grounded in physical existence (i.e., an existential self) it seems that most positive NDErs possess the confidence-in-hope that who they really are transcends this state of being, that their true being is the ultra vital "essential self" disclosed during the NDE event and afterwards via the given NDE after-effects. Now the real

question is, How does the "indicative" and "imperative" which characterizes both the called's and many NDEr's ontological status compare in a spiritual/religious context?

The conservative Reformed theologian characterizes the "indicative" of the redeemed's new being according to the in-dwelling work of the Holy Spirit such that, via Being-in-Christ, "the understanding is enlightened and the will inclined to obey the divine will, and the affections are effectually drawn to love, serve, and enjoy God"¹⁴³. All three of these fundamental elements are dependent upon that which is undoubtedly the *primary*, "given" and *conversion-specific* after-effect of regeneration itself, the implanting of the "supernatural new principle of life" in the called, i.e., faith.¹⁴⁴ Going beyond what was described above, this faith is said to be not only the assent to the proclamation's truth and a desire to serve God, but first and foremost is "fides propria". This "true personal faith"¹⁴⁵ is the God-given "supernatural virtue" by which the called grasp the saving benefits of Christ and, with the utmost trust, identify themselves with them; accepting them as their own¹⁴⁶. Therefore, for the conservative, Calling is God's sovereign act of changing an individual's being such that he/she is defined by his/her faith.¹⁴⁷ This immediately calls into question our observations in chapter five that for many experiencers, the given, NDE-specific after-effects include the conviction that one has a completely new, personal relationship with "God", including both an experientially based, understanding of God's nature as well as the belief that one possess new, or re-discovered, "gifts" which are given by God in

order to fulfil a unique, divinely ordained purpose for one's life. Since this person-defining reorientation is reported to be specifically NDE-generated and in the light of our conclusion above that, from the conservative perspective, the NDE does not represent conversion to Being-in-Christ, once again it seems rather evident that the conservative's conceptuality of God can not be the same as that related to these positive NDE after-effects.

Now we can see that in these cases the substantive issue largely becomes a question of sources. The conservative notion of such person-defining, intimate fellowship with God is based on God's presence in three specific ways: 1) Jesus Christ as the sole Mediator of vitalising fellowship between human beings and God; 2) the written and preached Word of God as the fundamental source for the knowledge and understanding of God; and 3) the in-dwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit as the sole enabling Power in the will, understand and affections as indicated above in terms of one's faith.¹⁴⁸ Of these three, it is the internal operations of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit which can be most readily, if not exclusively, correlated with the primary "source" relating to the indicative of the positive NDEr's being. In fact, because it is the spontaneously appearing psychic/spiritual NDE after-effects (i.e., those which are "given") which invariably ground this "already" of the NDEr's new being, it would be quite accurate to say that even for those experiencers whose NDE generated spiritual reorientation is described more in terms of a non-monotheistic type of spiritualism, it is the in-dwelling Holy Spirit which is most relevant here.

If we make a more specific enquiry regarding the redeemed's new being, we find the claim that after his/her conversion the called does not actually possess any "new faculties", but that all the "powers" of his/her soul have become "renovated".¹⁴⁹ As we have just seen this is the ontological change involved in conversion to Being-in-Christ from the conservative Reformed view point. However, along with the presence of the Holy Spirit in-dwelling the redeemed, it is expected that he/she will also receive, gratuitously, one or more "gifts of the Spirit" for the purpose of serving God by serving the life of the Church.¹⁵⁰ Hence, we might expect that the given after-effects of conversion/regeneration would include, as specified in Romans 12, one or more of the following gifts of the Spirit: "prophesying"¹⁵¹, "serving", "teaching", "encouraging"¹⁵², "contributing to the needs of others", "leadership", and/or "showing mercy". To these one can add those indicated in 1 Corinthians 12, and not already listed in Romans 12, "the message of wisdom", "the message of knowledge", "faith", "gifts of healing", "miraculous powers", "distinguishing between spirits", "speaking in different kinds of tongues", "the interpretation of tongues", and the (service of the) "apostles". In fact everything that truly draws out and intensifies the new life of the individual in-Christ, as well as the vitality of the Church, is deemed to be a supernatural gift (charisma) of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵³ Besides for a greatly enhanced intuitive sensibility - often described in terms of psychic abilities - and the awareness of the immediate presence of "God" within one's self, those positive NDE after-effects which many

experiencers have reported as being absolutely "given" include clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, supernatural rescue, transcendent guidance, guidance by spirits specifically, and extraordinary healing abilities. We came to the conclusion in the previous chapter that these post-NDE phenomena, phenomena that, as we found in chapter five, can not be attributed to any abilities possessed by experiencers before their NDEs, are indeed the sources from which many NDEr's derive the conviction that, like the called, they have undergone nothing less than a spiritual re-birth. Hence, the correlation between the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit and these given NDE after-effects is so striking that, even in the face of the various "problems" identified throughout this chapter, one can not but help to wonder anew if the NDE does somehow facilitate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for NDErs. Could the given NDE after-effects be manifestations of the essential self as an ontological reality grounded on the individual's renovated "soul", accompanied by the vivifying presence of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit? Can we identify the oft reported "quest" by NDEr's, to realise their essential self within the context of their existential lives, with the process of spiritual growth and development of the "new", "inner man" - the "inner being" - produced by regeneration for the redeemed, i.e., sanctification?¹⁵⁴ And, just how far can we liken many NDErs' struggle to centre their identity on the essential self within the context of their existential lives with this process of sanctification, whereby, because of the "not yet" or "imperative" of the redeemed's being, the called struggle to keep their identity centred on Jesus Christ

instead of his/her "old self" (i.e., the "relics of the flesh"¹⁵⁵)? Although it is by now not difficult to see that every one of these comparisons can be positively made to a significant degree on an ontological level, nevertheless, in a conservative Reformed (theological) context, we are forced to give a negative response to all of these questions. The reason for this is quite straight forward.

Since our interpretation of the positive NDE after-effects, as continuing manifestations of an Imperative of Vitality, is grounded on the "given" after-effects as *extraordinary per se*, in order to make a positive theological comparison with the spiritual status of the redeemed the gratuitous and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit would also have to be seen as a necessary aspect of the redeemed's status as a Being-in-Christ. However, from a strictly conservative Reformed position it is held that the miraculous, extraordinary gifts were given by God only to those living in the apostolic age, to serve as an external testimony of God's internal inspiration. With the establishment of the Church and the closure of the inspired canon of Scripture these were, therefore, no longer needed.¹⁵⁶ Here, as above with Schleiermacher's, it must be noted that this cessationalist perspective finds very little support in Bible. Historically such a rejection of these miraculous gifts of the Spirit has been based on the fear that they would become the norm for judging whether someone was truly a Christian or not, as well as the fear that these would be seen as a replacement for God's self-Revelation via God's Word.¹⁵⁷ However, the fact remains that most conservative Reformed theologians do

reject them as phenomena belonging to present-day, Christian experience. Now, not only does this remove any possibility for a positive theological correlation between the NDE-specific after-effects for the positive NDEr and the called's sanctification, but it compels us to make our final observation concerning the relationship between both of these highly significant ontological phenomena. If conservative Reformed theologians can not identify the Holy Spirit as the source of the positive NDEr's extraordinary abilities and communications - especially those which are "spiritual" (e.g. supernatural rescue, transcendent guidance, guidance by spirits specifically, and healing abilities) - then they, generally speaking, would be obliged to attribute them to the influence of evil/demonic powers.¹⁵⁸ Not doubt this assessment of the positive NDE after-effects would be confirmed for those taking the conservative point of view in the light of several other well-know NDE after-effects as well, e.g., some NDErs do leave their Christian churches, some do become involved in spiritualism, and a great proportion de-emphasise the necessity for any mediation of their new-found "inner" spiritual awareness. Perhaps the icing on the cake, as it were, of this conclusion would be Ring's finding that, compared to their beliefs before having their NDEs, 56% of his "mainline" Christian NDErs were more inclined to disagree with the statement that "Eternal life is a gift of God only to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord".¹⁵⁹

In the case of the negative NDE's after-effects the situation seems to be quite different. In contrast to the positive NDEr's feeling of "spiritual" renewal, our

limited information on the negative NDE, as considered in chapter five, strongly suggests that, if anything, it is one's spiritual depravity and impotence which grounds the negative NDE after-effects. Additionally, we should recall here our findings that negative NDEs may be just as common an occurrence as positive NDEs yet, because *they produce feelings of guilt and fear*, are simply not reported. It is not difficult to conclude then that the salvific presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit would not be seen as a possession of these individuals.

However, just as we had tentatively found a positive correlation above between the regret of Christian conversion and the regret experienced during the negative NDE event, the negative NDE after-effects would appear to have a positive relationship to the conservative model being considered, i.e., conversion to Being-in-Christ. Of particular importance here are the distinctive negative NDE after-effects of 1) a belief in the Devil or an evil force in the universe, and 2) a relatively high level of conversion to Bible-based Christianity. We would remain consistent with our conclusion above - that the NDE transmutation is not theologically equivalent to the conservative's regeneration - if we thus reason that the negative NDE after-effects suggest that the negative NDE is a precursor for the efficacious Call of the individual. Yet, if this is true then it is rather unlikely that the negative NDE is just as frequently experienced as the positive NDE though not reported, for the opportunity to "witness" to the circumstances of one's conversion would, no doubt in most cases, take precedence over any inhibiting feelings of guilt concerning one's pre-

conversion state of being. More important to the task at hand though, we would also have to harmonise our interpretation of the NDE crisis, as a critical aspect belonging to our understand of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality, with the crisis still required for the negative NDEr's post-NDE Calling via God's Word. In the light of all these observations, and those above, we must acknowledge that the model of the negative NDE as an IV is not theologically compatible with the conservative Call of God. And finally, in reference to the negative NDE-specific, given after-effect of being tormented/haunted by evil entities, although their presence seems to contradict the conservative assessment that the positive NDE represents a deception by the Devil, they would lend support to the alternative conservative assessment that all NDEs are probably little more than pathological, theologically insignificant hallucinations of some sort.

Moving on, into the context of Schleiermacher's theology, the two most significant issues which we need to address now have to do with the questions of whether the NDE after-effects support the idea 1) that those positive NDErs who encounter "Jesus" during their NDEs were already Christians, and/or 2) that the positive NDE itself, as well as its after-effects, represent the workings of God's grace in preparing an individual for conversion to Being-in-Christ. In terms of the negative NDE, in order to put our hypothesis in the previous section to the test, surely we need only address the latter of these two issues.

Our first question could be easily answered if the research which is available were to provided us with

both the religious orientation of all experiencers before their NDEs as well as information relating to which experiencers reported actually encountering Jesus during their NDEs. Unfortunately such a combination of data has not been published by those making up our primary study group. However two researchers do provide us with some very specific statistics which are indirectly related to the issue at hand. In one study it was found that, following their NDEs, 10 of 12 experiencers who were members of the Church of England prior to their NDEs left the church afterwards; 2 of 6 members of the Roman Catholic church left theirs; both of those belonging to the Methodist church left it; the only member of the Presbyterian church left it as did the only Baptist, Lutheran, Calvinist and Jew leave their communities; 2 other individuals not previously belonging to any religious institution became followers of Buddhism; while not a single individual of the remaining 23 in this study reported a conversion to Christianity (in any form) following their NDEs.¹⁶⁰ In another study it was found that 7 of 23 Protestants and 9 of 11 Roman Catholics developed more intense religious feelings, while 11 others from the same group of 23 Protestants and none of the Roman Catholics changed to alternate religious institutions, and 3 of the Protestants and 2 Roman Catholics adopted non-denominational religious orientations following their NDEs.¹⁶¹ The ambiguity of these findings neither confirms nor necessitates the absolute rejection of the theory that those who encounter Jesus during their NDEs were already Christians. Unfortunately this is the best conclusion that can be reached on this specific issue. Yet, we can

say further that, in addition to our previous observation that the disclosure of the essential self during the NDE does not suggest that the NDE event represents conversion to Being-in-Christ, the after-effects for the positive NDE relating exclusively to religiosity would seem to offer little support for the notion that the positive NDE represents the working of God's preparatory grace. Before we accept this observation though, let us investigate this question in more detail.

Now we have seen in several places above that one's "self-understanding" is a critical factor in Schleiermacher's system, especially when it comes to the issue of an individual's propensity for conversion to Being-in-Christ. To reiterate a substantive point, only when a person comes to the awareness that his/her very existence is determined by his/her world-consciousness rather than God-consciousness is there the possibility for him/her to recognise Jesus as the Redeemer.¹⁶² Of course this realisation must be accompanied by the feeling that this is an unacceptable way of being. Hence, Schleiermacher believes that such a spiritual state of being will be characterised by the pain which is felt each time one's God-consciousness is briefly evoked or elicited yet without the will's ability to act in a manner which is harmonious, and thus sustaining, of it. In other words, Schleiermacher posits that until an individual is able to "take command" of him/herself, i.e., be in a manner consistent with the feeling of absolute dependence¹⁶³, he/she will not enjoy the peace which comes with a God-consciousness which has become a "definite and effective agency...capable of growth"¹⁶⁴.

We did find in the previous chapter that many positive NDErs do "return" with the desire to "live up to", or in a manner appropriate to, their "true nature" (i.e., essential self) as revealed during the NDE. This understanding, evoked most explicitly via one of the NDE "boundary" phenomena, that one is not ready, and consequently able, to remain separated from one's existential life, was described in terms of a commissioning experience. In fact, we have also just noted above that the given after-effects themselves play a critical role in many NDEr's efforts to, in a sense, *become or realise*, within their existential lives, this essential self. But, can this rather positive correlation - based on the positive NDEr's new self-understanding - go beyond the ontological, allowing for an interpretation of the positive NDE after-effects in which they are equated with that which Schleiermacher asserts is evidence of God's preparatory grace?

Part of most NDErs' understanding relating to their need to actualise their essential self is directly linked to the two primary reasons NDErs give for their "return" 1) to support loved ones, and, more generally, 2) to fulfil their newly understood purpose in life. As noble as the former reason is it is clearly not indicative that one has drawn any nearer than before to the consciousness of needing the Redeemer in the sense which Schleiermacher's system postulates. Now the latter, in and of itself, is not particularly helpful here either, as it is a rather vague way of describing one's spiritual self-understanding. Once again it is the given after-effects of the positive NDE which

provide us with a much richer source for exploring the NDE's nature here.

In the first place we should recall our own conclusion in the previous chapter that practically all of the given after-effects have to do with an alteration, if not raising, of one's consciousness. We were even able to make the observation that, for many NDErs, the given after-effects lead to a significantly enhanced awareness of one's self and world, as well as the conviction that one continued to enjoy an awareness of what has been described above as the external, transcendent Ground, or Reality, of the essential self. The most informative observation we can now make goes beyond the obvious connection between what appears to be a clear manifestation of the God-consciousness continuously breaking into these NDEr's self-consciousness. What is most meaningful here is the fact that the dissonance which NDErs experience because of this phenomenon relates not to one's need for a redeemer, or facilitator of a person-defining God-consciousness, but one's struggle to incorporate this altered state of consciousness within one's existential life. Again, we cannot stress this point enough, invariably the NDEr's desire is not for a mediator of God-consciousness *per se* but for a source of spiritual guidance and understanding. The self-understanding which Schleiermacher associates with preparatory grace is one in which there is a felt need to surrender one's will to something which will put an end to the pain of being "separated" from the Whence of one's true self.¹⁶⁵ In contrast, the given after-effects of the positive NDE seem to put one directly in-touch with this Whence to

such an extent that, more often than not, the individual is overwhelmed, just as he/she was during the NDE. Even Schleiermacher's highly ontological conception of sin, as described above, seems foreign to this situation. It is thus that we must acknowledge that it is not conversion to Being-in-Christ which the after-effects of the positive NDE ultimately inspire but, to one degree or another, the understanding that one must pursue the development of one's own essential self before one will be ready to return for good to one's real "home", i.e., that experienced as the NDE "world". Thus we conclude that, regardless of many positive NDErs' rather distinctive self-understanding arising from their sense of being "commissioned" and the NDE-specific after-effects, there exist a very weak theological connection here with Schleiermacher's conception of the workings of God's preparatory grace leading to Being-in-Christ.

It is equally as unlikely that we can make a positive theological correlation between the after-effects of the negative NDE and Schleiermacher's notion of God's grace in bringing an individual to conversion to Being-in-Christ. There are two interrelated points upon which this observation is based, both having to do with the primary factor which so often, if not apparently always, negative NDErs have reported motivated them to convert to a Bible-based Christianity. In the first place it has been found that the negative NDE-specific after-effects which are critical here are experiences of being "haunted" or "tormented" by evil entities. It is these phenomena - experienced during the negative NDE event itself as well after the NDE event - which lead negative NDErs to seek out a

guarantee that they will not spend eternity dwelling in the "home" of the Devil, i.e., in "hell".¹⁶⁶ However, not only is the reality of such a definitively "supernatural" entity itself inconsistent with Schleiermacher's theological system in theory, but he explicitly rejects the notion of the Devil's existence outright.¹⁶⁷ In addition to this fact it must be added that, according to Schleiermacher, God does not prepare a person for conversion to Being-in-Christ via the fear of eternal damnation, but through the positive dissonance that arises in one's self-consciousness between one's own imperfect state of being and the "sinlessness and perfection" of Jesus Christ as He is communicated by the Christian church.¹⁶⁸

Thus, in this section we have reached the point where we must acknowledge that there is a highly improbably positive theological correlation between the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality and a generalised, conservative Reformed perspective as well as that offered by Schleiermacher. The ambiguous nature of the positive NDE's effect on experiencers' religiosity is here critical, as is the fact that the supernatural/extraordinary, given after-effects for both the positive and negative NDEr are simply not acceptable to either Reformed position as evidence that God is at work in these individual's lives. Of course the fundamental point of divergence here has to do with Jesus Christ as the ground of redeemed human being, a concept whose undeniable absence among the NDE-specific after-effects simply cannot be ignored, even in relation to Schleiermacher's highly liberal theological system. This is not to say that there was not also some rather

positive contributions to our exploration in this section. Yet again, the surprisingly high level of ontological similarity was evidence in a number of ways, particularly in reference to the eschatological nature of both the NDEr's and redeemed's transformed states of being (within a conservation context) and, similarly, the stimulation to fully realise one's essential self by somehow drawing nearer to the source of one's very existence (within the context of Schleiermacher's system).

6.0 Conclusions

In conclusion, we should begin by recalling that both the ontological and theological observations throughout this chapter have been made strictly within only two contexts - one delineated by a generalised conception of conservative Reformed theology and the other by the mature work of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Hence, our conclusions have by no means provided the last word on the NDE's religious/spiritual significance as an Imperative of Vitality. Further, our final theological conclusions themselves are really only of secondary importance within the scheme of our whole project, as it was our primary, stated purpose in this chapter to *reach a thorough understanding of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality specifically within the contexts specified*. For instance, our theological understanding of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality would have no doubt been much different within those theological contexts in which, for example, the freedom of the individual is not consistently side-lined in preference to the sovereignty of God. Even within our own analysis we found a great difference in how to approach the NDE theologically due to the difference between the conservative notion of God's Self-alienation and Schleiermacher's understanding of God's continuous availability (as a necessary aspect of what it means to be a human being even for the unredeemed). The rejection of the highly significant, NDE-specific, given after-effects from both perspectives - as evidence of God's presence in the individual's life - was a crucial factor in the final rejection of the NDE as a

theologically significant phenomenon. If these, along with all of the NDE characteristics, were considered within a charismatic Christian Theological context, or even one relating to the Eastern Orthodox church, it is probable that our exploration of the NDE as an IV would have been much different. Our analysis would also have taken on a much different character had we explored the NDE from within those Christian theological contexts which are not so radically Christo-centric, as both the conservative's and Schleiermacher's are. The real point being made is that what is of most importance for us here is not just the theological conclusions that we were able to reach, but understanding how and why we reached the ones we did. With these points in mind, let us now reflect on our findings.

On one level our exploration in this chapter has revealed a striking correlation between the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality and those concepts within a Reformed context which centre on the ontological question of what it means to be a human being. Of critical importance in this positive relationship are the notions of the need for a radical shift in personal identity in order to appropriate one's "true", vital nature and the necessity for conscious "communion" with the transcendent Ground of one's being in order for such a change to be a possibility. Within a conservative Reformed context these positive ontological correlations were evidenced specifically as follows: 1) true human vitality is dependent on a "supernatural" revelation of the Source of all life; 2) which is facilitated by a singular, radical challenge to one's self-sufficient-being-in-the-world; 3) followed by a liberating

transformation of one's being; 4) which is externally intentioned and hidden, though the continuity of one's person identity is not destroyed; 4) resulting in a shift in personal identity to one's essential rather than existential being, and 5) ultimately disclosing the eschatological nature of "true" human being. From the perspective of Schleiermacher's system the basic ontological correlations can be described in terms of 1) the appropriation of one's essential self; 2) as a vitalising shift in personal identity away from one's sensibly determined self-consciousness; 3) resulting from the "natural" emergence of one's higher self-consciousness (i.e. feeling of absolute dependence) as the determinant of one's being; 4) such that the relationship between one's essential self, as *absolutely* given by the "Whence" of one's existence, and its Source is itself appropriated.

Hence, on a strictly ontological level, it is possible to offer two different answers to the question which was posed at the end of our phenomenological analysis of the NDE in the previous chapter: Does the NDEr's "transmutation", disclosed during the NDE event as well as following it via the given after-effects, represent simply a change in the experient's self-awareness or an actual alteration of his/her very being? From our investigation above it is quite easy to say now that, from a conservative point of view the NDE would seem to facilitate an actual change of one's being, while from Schleiermacher's it would be interpreted in terms of a critical, enduring change in the experient's self-consciousness. These observations underline the fundamental ontological difference between

Schleiermacher's and the conservative's systems as evidenced throughout our investigation above: for Schleiermacher one's being is defined by one's self-consciousness, while for the conservative's one's self-consciousness is defined by one's state of being. This difference actually enabled us to explore the NDE as an IV more comprehensibly, providing us with correlations from both perspectives which have deepened our understanding of the NDE's ontological significance. Thus, from within both contexts we found that not only was the imperative nature of the NDE confirmed, but so was its meaningfulness as a phenomenon having to do with life rather than death. Perhaps the most important implication of these ontological correlations is that they support our critical reassessment of the NDE's primary significance as a phenomenon manifesting the essence of human being as self-transcendence. However, on a theological level a much different story has unfolded.

If we turn to our conservative analysis first we find that the fundamental difference between the NDE as an IV and the Call of God invariably centred on God's sovereignty, and in particular, God's Self-revelation. Hence, from the very start, even though the profound nature of the NDE crisis suggested that it could possibly represent an indictment by God of one's status as a being who is spiritually dead, we quickly saw that without the concomitant exposure to the preached Word of God such could hardly be the case. We came to plainly see that the continuous and unconditional availability of the external Ground of the NDE in various forms simply contradicted the conservative idea of God's Self-

alienation for all but the elect. This issue reached its climax in relation to the extraordinary, NDE-specific positive NDE after-effects, where we came to the conclusion that the conservative Reformed theologian would almost certainly attribute these to the influence of evil, demonic powers. On a secondary level, these observations were complimented by what came to be seen as theologically unsustainable comparisons between 1) the NDEr's centeredness on his/her existential state of being and being a sinful, depraved enemy of God, along with 2) the NDEr's centeredness on his/her essential self and the redeemed's orientation to Jesus Christ as the Mediator and Ground of one's new, vital being. We have found that the NDE as an IV communicates that the lack of true human being is rooted in an improper knowledge of the nature of one's own unique self. Indeed, this is relatively similar to the conservative perspective concerning the self-understanding required for conversion to Being-in-Christ from a strictly human point of view, yet this alone is not enough (for the conservative Reformed theologian) to evidence the actual occurrence of God's salvific Call. Generally speaking, we saw that the NDEr regrets not having lived "authentically" and has "faith" in the transcendent nature of his/her own being, as its vitality is derived from a transcendent Source upon which it is *directly* grounded. Yet, again, by the end of our investigation it became quite clear that, regardless of this fact, most conservative theologians would indeed interpret the positive NDE (as an IV) as an evil, deceptive vision of the inherent goodness of human being apart from Jesus Christ. Such a serious theological observation is only

slightly tempered by the facts of the negative NDE, where conversion to Christianity is apparently the norm due to assaults on experiencers', both during and after their NDEs, by evil forces and entities. Taking these cases into consideration our final conclusion was that, in all probability, the conservative Reformed theologian would decide that the NDE, even as an Imperative of Vitality, represents a theologically insignificant pathological state of being.

Unlike the model of conversion via God's Call which was used to explore the relationship between the NDE and the conservative perspective, that based on Schleiermacher's theology had at its core the issue of "religious experience" itself. No doubt due largely to his own phenomenological approach, throughout most of our discussion we found that the NDE as an IV probably would have been considered by Schleiermacher to be theologically, or better "religiously", significant. The most convincing theological correlation was made in regard to the "natural" emergence of one's higher self-consciousness (i.e., one's God-consciousness) as the determinant element of one's being. Here, due largely to the ideas that the NDE essential self is the posited self in the feeling of absolute dependence and that the transcendent Ground of the NDE is the same as one's Whence, we were able to construct a theory which seemed to account for 1) why the near-death context is the trigger for the NDE, 2) the differences between the extremely positive and extremely negative NDEs, 3) the differences in experiences for pre-NDE Christian and non-Christians, 4) the differences in length and depth of NDEs from individual to individual, and even 5) why

the NDE is highly influenced by the religious/spiritual context in which the experient lives. After ruling out the possibilities that this model could support either of the assertions that the NDE represents one's regeneration or conversion to Being-in-Christ, and determining that we did not have the necessary research information to establish whether or not those positive NDErs encountering Jesus during their NDEs were pre-NDE Christians or not, the bottom line became whether the positive and negative NDEs could be understood in terms of the workings of God's preparatory grace. Yet we soon found out that this was probably not the case, as the dissonance which individuals experience following their positive NDEs is not that they are in need of Jesus Christ as their Redeemer, but that they need to somehow learn to incorporate their altered state of consciousness - inextricably linked to their essential self - into their existential lives. As for the rejection of this theological interpretation in relation to negative NDErs, we simply noted Schleiermacher's own rejection of both the existence of evil entities and the motivation for conversion to Being-in-Christ founded on the fear of eternal damnation. It would seem that if the NDE does represent the workings of God's preparatory grace, as described by Schleiermacher, it is to an extent which is imperceptible in what he sees are specifically Christian terms.

ENDNOTES

¹ Rahner, Karl (1974) *Theological Investigation Volume VI: Concerning Vatican Council II*. Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London, 394.

² Tillich, Paul (1968) *Systematic Theology* (Combined Volume). James Nisbet & CO LTD, William Clowes and Sons Limited, London, Vol. I, 124.

³ Schleiermacher, F. (1928) *The Christian Faith*. English translation of the second German edition (1830) edited by Mackintosh, D.D., and Stewart, B.D., T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh.

⁴ *Kletos*, *klesis* and *kaleo* are the primary Greek words which are translated into English as "call", "calls", "called", and/or "calling" in the both the LXX and the New Testament. (Packer, J.I. "call, calling" in *EDT*, 184).

⁵ See especially Dt 27:26; Gal 3:10 and Jas 2:10

⁶ See Gal 3:10.

⁷ Heppe, H.L.J. (1950) *Reformed dogmatics*. revised and edited by Bizer, E., translated by Thomson, G.T., George Allen and Unwin LTD, London, 513-516. See also Gen 8:21 and Rom 3:9-18.

⁸ Coenen, L. "Call" in *NIDNTT*, volume 1, 271-276; and Heppe, H.L.J., 514-5.

⁹ The Westminster Confession states the Reformed doctrine of Total Inability in the following manner: "Man, by his fall Into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." (Ch. IX, sec. III.) There exists are large number of biblical passages which are believed to support this idea, e.g., "remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." (Eph 2:12) For a concise treatment of this theme see Van Til, C. (1962) "Original sin, imputation, and inability",

Chapter 15 in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, edited by Henry, Carl F.H., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.

¹⁰ For example see Rom 5:10 and Col 1:21.

¹¹ John 8:34; Rom 7:14, 25.

¹² 1 John 3:4

¹³ The conservative view makes it quite plain that existence before being Called does not merit the designation "life". (Jeremias J. (1971) *New testament theology: part one, the proclamation of Jesus*. SCM Press LTD, London, 133).

¹⁴ See Rom 6:16 and 6:23.

¹⁵ Berkhof, L. (1959) *Systematic Theology*. Banner of Truth Trust, London, 468. See also Brunner, E (1942) *The divine imperative: a study in Christian ethics*. translated by Wyon, O., Lutterworth Press, London and Redhill, 198-199.

¹⁶ This "justifying faith" must be distinguished from the "special faith" spoken of in Mt 17:20, 9:28; Gal 5:22; and 1 Cor 12:9, which is connected with the supernatural working of miracles. It would seem, that in some instances, a person may have this special faith without first possessing justifying faith (e.g., Mt 7:22). See Bromiley in *ISBE*, volume 2, 270; and Michel, O. in *NIDNTT*, volume 1, 601-602.

¹⁷ Calvin stresses the fact that justifying faith cannot come about simply through knowledge of God's Will, but must include the understanding of His "promise of grace" in order that one can approach God in the light of His benevolence and mercy. Thus Calvin's definition of faith: "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Calvin, J. (1961) *Institutes of the christian religion*. translated by Battles, F.L., edited by McNeill, J.T., SCM Press LTD, London, III,ii,7.). Also see Heppe, 512-518.

¹⁸ 2 Thes 2:13-14. See also Wyttenback in Heppe, 28, 527. "The efficient cause of saving faith is effectual calling, proceeding from God's immutable election." (Dabney, R. L. (1985) *Systematic theology*. The Banner of

Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 601).

¹⁹ From the conservative Reformed position the unconditional character of God's Call is inseparable from the unconditional nature of God's election of those who will be saved via Being-in-Christ. For related themes see the following biblical references, which are typically referred to by the conservative, Reformed theologian. Election is 1) according to God's purpose exclusively (e.g., Rom 9:11 and Eph 1:11); determined from eternity (e.g. Eph 1:4); a matter directly evidencing God's sovereignty (e.g. Rom 9:15,16; 1 Cor 1:27 and Eph 1:11); has nothing to do with an unredeemed person's "merit" (e.g. Rom 9:11) and thus is a fully gracious act of God (e.g., Rom 11:5).

²⁰ See McDonagh, E. (1975) *Gift and call towards a christian theology of morality*. MacMillan, London; Bühlmann, W. (1982) *The chosen peoples*. translated by Barr, R. R., St Paul Publications, Middlegreen; and Rahner, K. (1989) "Magisterium" in *Encyclopedia of theology: the concise Sacramentum Mundi*. edited by Rahner, K., Crossroad, New York, 871-880.

²¹ See Brunner, E. (1964) *Truth as encounter*. translated by Loos, A., Cairns, D. and Parker T.H.L., Westminster, Philadelphia.

²² Leiden Synopsis in Heppe, 515.

²³ Schleiermacher, 108,3.

²⁴ Undeniably there are types of conversion which seem to be "mainly a happy rescue from despair" (Ibid, 108,3)

²⁵ For instance, see Schleiermacher, 62,1.

²⁶ Ibid, 108,2.

²⁷ Weber, O. (1983) *Foundations of dogmatics*, volume two. translated and annotated by Guder, D.L., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 420-421.

²⁸ Schleiermacher, 54,2.

²⁹ Ibid, 54,1.

³⁰ Ibid, 100,2. It is not difficult to see here how influential John Calvin had been on Schleiermacher,

especially in regard to the concept of how God is experienced by human beings not just according to His Creation as a whole, but, more immediately, within a person's very being itself, e.g., "We must therefore admit in God's individual works - but especially in them as a whole - that God's powers are actually represented as in a painting....Now those powers appear most clearly in his works. Yet we comprehend their chief purpose, their value, and the reason why we should ponder them, only when we descend into ourselves and contemplate by what means the Lord shows in us his life, wisdom, and power; and exercises in our behalf his righteousness, goodness, and mercy." (Calvin, I, v, 10)

³¹ Schleiermacher, 90,1 and 100,2.

³² Ibid, 106,2.

³³ Ibid, 120,2

³⁴ Ibid, 14, postscript.

³⁵ Ibid, 14,1.

³⁶ Ibid, 4,1-4.

³⁷ Ibid, 11,2.

³⁸ Ibid, 5,3.

³⁹ Ibid, 11,2.

⁴⁰ Berkhof, 469.

⁴¹ Smeaton, G. (1974) *The Doctrine of the holy spirit*. Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 199.

⁴² Barth, K. (1968) *The Epistle to the Romans*. translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Oxford University Press, London, 322.

⁴³ 2 Tim 1:9. See also Rom 8:28-30; Rom 9:11-11; Gal 1:6; Gal 5:8; 2 Thes 2:13-15 13; and Titus 3:5.

⁴⁴ The distinct, New Testament use of these words has, though, its main roots in the Isaiahic development, whereby God not only "invites" men and women but also secures the appropriate response to His Call. (Packer, J.I. "call, calling" in *EDT*, 184). Chapters 40 to 52 in Isaiah are of particular significance, for it is here

that God Calls (43:1; 45:4), or chooses, Israel to be His own people (Isa. 43:7). This points to His covenant relationship with Israel, in which its salvation is assured, its role as God's special witness established, and its security guaranteed in that God promises to respond to their appeals to Him even before they ask (Isa. 65:24). (Bromiley, G.W. "call, calling" in *ISBE*, volume 1, 580-582. See also, Schmidt, K.L. "Call, calling and called" in *TDNT*, 394-402, 395).

⁴⁵ Brunner, 1942, 199. Also, see Heppe, 516.

⁴⁶ Schleiermacher, 108,2 and 120, postscript.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 108,2

⁴⁸ Ibid, 106,1.

⁴⁹ Weber, 159. See also Barth, 176 and 502.

⁵⁰ Barth, 98-99.

⁵¹ "...the growing continuity of the new life in which the elements answering to its formula are more and more integrated and the elements representing the old life recur ever more feebly and rarely is denoted by the expression 'sanctification'." (Schleiermacher, 106,1).

⁵² Schleiermacher, 106,2.

⁵³ Ibid, 106,1.

⁵⁴ Barth, K. (1957) *Church dogmatics*. editors Bromiley, B.W., and Torrance, T.F., translators Parker, T.H.L., Johnston, W.B., Harold Knight, D., and Haire, J.L.M., T & T Clark LTD, Edinburgh, IV, 3, ii, 507-508

⁵⁵ Schleiermacher, 100,2.

⁵⁶ See section Two, "The NDEr and His/Her Context" of the previous chapter.

⁵⁷ Schleiermacher, 106,2. See also Burmann in Heppe, 519.

⁵⁸ Col 2:11-12, see also Rom 6:1-14. ⁵⁸. Also See Berkhof, 533. In his *Institutes* Calvin shows that, within the context of the effects of receiving Christ's grace (via God's call), the "sum of the Christian life" is the "denial of ourselves", i.e., the mortification of all

aspects of the self which seek to serve the self and not God. (Calvin, III,vii,1-10.).

⁵⁹ Eph 2:1-7.

⁶⁰ See Bromiley in *ISBE*, volume 2, 271. Calvin treats at some length the point that the called's righteousness is grounded solely on the gracious union with Jesus Christ - "man is not righteous in himself but because the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation." (Calvin, III,ii,23, see also all of III,ii,13-23.) For biblical references commonly cited by the conservative Reformed theologian regarding this point see Rom 6:10; 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14, 7:16 and Rev 1:18. See also Schleiermacher, 163, 1-2 and Routley, E. (1957) *The gift of conversion*. Lutterworth Press, London, 108-113.

⁶¹ For a few examples of passages which are commonly cited in support of the mediatorship of Jesus Christ see Matt 26:31; Luke 2:14, 22:29-30; John 3:16, 4:10, 4:19; Acts 20:28; Rom 5:8, 5:10; Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:13; Titus 3:4; 2 Tim 2:5 and Heb 9:14.

⁶² For examples of this union with Christ see Rom 8:30; I Cor 1:9; Gal 1:15; II Thes 2:13-14; II Tim 1:8-9; Heb 9:15; I Pet 2:9; II Pet 1:3.

⁶³ see Phil 3:10; Barth, 1968, 323-4; and Schleiermacher, 100, 2.

⁶⁴ Coenen, 273.

⁶⁵ Schleiermacher, 63.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 66,2. Schleiermacher's admits that, within his system, sin as a violation of God's law is equivalent to sin as a "turning away from the Creator" only to the extent that God and His law are synonymous (66,2). He does recognise though, along with the conservative perspective, that one's "consciousness of sin comes from the law" (Ibid, 68,3).

⁶⁷ Ibid, 106,1.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 66,2.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 66,2.

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- ⁷⁰ Ibid, 87,2.
- ⁷¹ Ibid, 11,2 (*Italic mine*).
- ⁷² Ibid, 106,1.
- ⁷³ Ibid, 100,2.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid, 94,2.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid, 110,2.
- ⁷⁶ 1 Cor 2:16. For related biblical passages see John 16:13-16, 17:6-8; and Eph 3:3-4.
- ⁷⁷ See Acts 17:24-28, especially 17:28.
- ⁷⁸ Schleiermacher, 100,2.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 11,2.
- ⁸¹ Ibid, 68,3.
- ⁸² Smeaton, 402.
- ⁸³ For example, as Romans treats at length, via God's call men are made aware for the first time of the predestinating love of God towards them. (Barrett, C.K. (1991) *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. A & C Black, London, 170).
- ⁸⁴ Guhrt, J. "Rebirth, regeneration" in *NIDNTT*, volume 1, 184. For examples of this see Jer 24:7; 31:18, 33; Isa 60:31; Eze 36:26.
- ⁸⁵ Eze 11:19.
- ⁸⁶ Schleiermacher, 166,2.
- ⁸⁷ The following passages support this idea rather explicitly Gen 2:17, Rom 6:23 and Rom 7:9.
- ⁸⁸ For example, see Acts 2:38-44; Heppe, 570-572; Keckermann in Heppe, 520; Berkhof, 482-492; and Dabney, 651-660.
- ⁸⁹ Schleiermacher, 108,2.

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- ⁹⁰ Heppe, 520. The eschatological reality is that salvation and condemnation - grace and judgement - are both necessarily contained here within the imperative to repent, as the Call of God continues to sound before the inevitable judgement to come. (Jeremias, 122-135).
- ⁹¹ Schleiermacher, 91,1.
- ⁹² Kimberly Clark in Flynn, C.P. (1986) *After the beyond: human transformation and the near-death experience*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 83-86.
- ⁹³ Olevian in Heppe, 514. See also Barth, 1957, IV, 3, ii, 519.
- ⁹⁴ Smeaton, 403.
- ⁹⁵ Schleiermacher, 14,1.
- ⁹⁶ Calvin I,i,1 and I,i,2.
- ⁹⁷ See also Dabney, 649. See also Schleiermacher, 108,5 and Heppe, 516.
- ⁹⁸ Fee, G.D. (1987) *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 76-7. A biblical passage which expresses this particular conception of enlightenment in conversion especially well comes from the First Epistle to the Corinthians: "Jews demand miraculous signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has Called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." 1 Cor 1:22-24. See also Schleiermacher, 14,1.
- ⁹⁹ Schleiermacher, 14, 1-2 and Barth, 1957, IV, 3, ii, 530.
- ¹⁰⁰ For example Schleiermacher states, "The Redeemer assumes the believers into the fellowship of His unclouded blessedness, and this is His reconciling activity." (Schleiermacher, prop 101).
- ¹⁰¹ This is true even in Schleiermacher's system, where God is spoken of a person's "Whence". (Schleiermacher, 4,4.) This point must be kept in mind, as it was described in the first section above: "...it is only through the self-consciousness of his/her experiences of

all that is 'other' than the self (e.g., people, the physical environment, and ideas) that a person comes to experience his/her relationship to God as that which is completely different from all these relationships as well as the reflective self of objectifying perceptions (i.e. the Ego).

¹⁰² As we recall this phrase comes from our succinct definition of the NDE as an Imperative of Vitality in the previous chapter: "Going beyond the concept of homecoming it is submitted that such a disclosure takes place because during the timeless moments of the NDE experiencers receive an authoritative exhortation to live their unique lives authentically by conforming to what is revealed to be their essential being."

¹⁰³ Matt 10:37-39.

¹⁰⁴ Barth, 1957, IV, 3, ii, 537. See also Rom 5:1, 8:6, 12:1-2, 15:33, 16:20; 1 Cor 1:20-25, 7:15, 7:31, 14:33; and 2 Cor 1:12, 10:2. We have seen above how Schleiermacher describes this in term of the redeemed's liberation from his/her world-consciousness as the determinant of one's existence.

¹⁰⁵ See Schleiermacher, 91,1; 108,2; 113, 1-3; and 148, 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 16, 1-4 and Weber, 511-518.

¹⁰⁷ Col 1:12.

¹⁰⁸ Col 1:13. See Brunner, 1942, 207.

¹⁰⁹ See Schleiermacher, 110,3 and 121, 1-2; For key Biblical passages commonly cited in relation to this idea of the Kingdom of God see Thes 2:12, Phil 3:14 and Heb 3:1.

¹¹⁰ Rom 14:17 and 1 Cor 15:42-54.

¹¹¹ Calvin, III,iii,3.

¹¹² 1 Pet 3:9. See also Dt 10:18-19; Matt 5:43-48; Rom 12:9-21; and 1 Cor 4:12-13.

¹¹³ Schleiermacher, 155, 1-2. See also 2 Tim 4:1, 18.

¹¹⁴ See Moody, R.A., Jr. (1975) *Life after life*. Mockingbird Books, New York, 59; Green, T. J., and

Friedman, P. (1983) Near-death experiences in a southern california population. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3, 88-91; Ring, K. (1980) *Life at death a scientific investigation of the near-death experience*. Coward, McCann and Georghagan, New York, 57; Gallup, G. Jr., with Proctor, W. (1983) *Adventures in immortality: a look beyond the threshold of death*. Souvenir, London, 50; and Sabom, M. (1982) *Recollections of death: a medical investigation*. Corgi Books, Transworld Publishers LTD, London, 282-284 (Table XIII).

¹¹⁵ Irwin, H.J., and Bramwell, B.A. (1988) The devil in heaven: a near-death experience with both positive and negative facets. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 7 (1), 38-43 and Atwater, P.M.H. (1992) Is there a hell? surprising observations about the NDE. *The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 10 (3), 158.

¹¹⁶ 2 Cor 11:14; Eph 6:11; 2 Thes 2:9; and Rev 16:14.

¹¹⁷ Schleiermacher, 106,1.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 67,2.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 5,4.

¹²⁰ See Schleiermacher, 66, 1-2.

¹²¹ Ibid, 5,3.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid, 5,4.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid note in 3,2.

¹²⁶ "But there is no determination of the immediate sensible self-consciousness which is incompatible with the higher..." (Ibid, 5,5).

¹²⁷ Ibid, 5,4.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ See Schleiermacher, 88, 1-4.

¹³⁰ In both of the following two studies it was found that the NDE world "natives" is largely a matter of

one's cultural context, e.g. the Indian NDErs encountered their own gods instead of Jesus Christ and/or biblical figures. (See Stevenson, I., and Pasricha, S. (1986) Near-death experiences in India - a preliminary report. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 174 (3), 165-170) See also Counts, D.A. (1983) Near-death and OBE experience in a Melanesian society. *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 3 (1), 115-136) and Groth-Marnat, G. (1994) Cross-cultural perspectives on the near-death experience. *Australian Parapsychological Review*, 19, 7-11.

¹³¹ Schleiermacher, 108,6.

¹³² Ibid, 101,1.

¹³³ Ibid, 91,1.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 11,3.

¹³⁵ According to Schleiermacher what distinguishes Christianity from all other forms of religion is the centrality not only of redemption but of Jesus as the one and only Redeemer (See Schleiermacher, 11,3).

¹³⁶ Ibid, 100,1.

¹³⁷ See Weber, 182 and 222.

¹³⁸ Thielicke, H. (1974) *The evangelical faith*. translated and edited by Bromiley, G.W. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, volume I, 304.

¹³⁹ Hodge, C. (1873) *Systematic theology*. Thomas Nelson and Sons, London and Edinburgh, 247.). See also Calvin, 3,3,14; 3,7,5 and Dabney, 668. For some examples of appropriate biblical references see Eccles 7:20; 1 John 1:8; Phil 3:12-14; and Jas 3:2.

¹⁴⁰ Berkhof, 468.

¹⁴¹ Routley, 108.

¹⁴² Thielicke, 175.

¹⁴³ Smeaton, 223.

¹⁴⁴ Heppe, 538.

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- ¹⁴⁵ Wolleb in Heppe, 530.
- ¹⁴⁶ Heidegger in Heppe, 33, 530 (Bold and italics mine). Dabney too argues that faith is primarily an active trust in Christ seated in the depths of the called's heart. (Dabney, 600-606).
- ¹⁴⁷ Wyttenback in Heppe, 28, 527. "The efficient cause of saving faith is effectual calling, proceeding from God's immutable election." (Dabney, 601).
- ¹⁴⁸ Henry, C.F.H. (1982) *God, revelation and authority*, volume V: *God who stands and stays*. Word Books Publishers, Waco, Texas, 191-213.
- ¹⁴⁹ Smeaton, 199.
- ¹⁵⁰ Esser, H.H. in *NIDNTT*, volume 2, 121. See also Schmidt, K.L. in *TDNT*, 394-402, for a more detailed treatment of the important relationship between God's Call and the "church" as a community of the called.
- ¹⁵¹ Along with "the message of wisdom" and "the message of knowledge" listed in 1 Cor 12, "prophesying" belongs to the gift of proclamation of the Gospel. (See Esser, 121).
- ¹⁵² This is *paraklesis*, "spiritual exhortation". (Esser, 121).
- ¹⁵³ Conzelmann, H. in *TDNT*, 1306.
- ¹⁵⁴ Sanctification represents the maturation of that which was begotten in regeneration, i.e., the "moral purification of the soul" (Dabney, 661-663). For Hodge, "Sanctification, therefore consists in two things: first, the removing more and more of the principles of evil still infecting our nature, and destroying their power; and secondly, the growth of the principle of spiritual life until it controls the thoughts, feelings, and acts, and brings the soul into conformity to the image of Christ." (Hodge, 221). See also Berkhof, 532. For the conservative idea that sanctification is the sole work of God see Hodge 214-216, 226; Berkhof, 532-533; Smeaton, 198; and Dabney, 665. For biblical references see Gal 2:20, 4:19; Eph 3:16; Phil 2:13; Col 1:11; 1 Thes 5:23; Heb 13:20-12; and John 15:4.
- ¹⁵⁵ Calvin, J. (1849 edition) *Commentaries on the Epistle*

of Paul to the Romans. translated and edited by Owen, J.T., Constable, Edinburgh, 267. Here Calvin tells us that the Called man, the "faithful, are "divided into two parts - the relics of the flesh, and grace".

¹⁵⁶ See Smeaton, G. (1974) *The Doctrine of the holy spirit*. Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 55-61.

¹⁵⁷ See Hollenweger, W.J. (1969) *The Pentecostals*. SCM Press LTD, London; Lovelace, R.F. (1979) *Dynamics of spiritual life: an Evangelical theology of renewal*. The Paternoster Press, Exeter; and *Charismatic experiences in history* (1985). edited by Robeck, C.M., Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts.

¹⁵⁸ Smeaton, 59. See also Thielicke 178-180. For biblical references see Matt 7:15-20, 1 Cor 12:1-3, 1 Thes 5:19-22, and 1 John 4:1-6.

¹⁵⁹ The most conservative, in a Christian sense, of all the groups was that comprised of NDE interested persons, of which only 36.4% tended to disagree that belief in Jesus Christ was the only way to Eternal life, especially since only 44% of them were mainline christians. (Ring, 1984, 316).

¹⁶⁰ Two NDErs changed from belonging to no religion before the NDE to being religiously affiliated afterwards: one became a Roman Catholic and another a Buddhist. (Sutherland, 1990, 25).

¹⁶¹ Grey, M. (1985) *Return from death*. Arkana (Routledge and Kegan Paul), London, 110.

¹⁶² Schleiermacher, 100,1.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 68,1.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 69,3.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 108, 6.

¹⁶⁶ See Grey, 72, Atwater, 157, and Bauer, M. (1985) *Near-death experiences and attitude change. Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 5, 45-46.

¹⁶⁷ Schleiermacher, 44, 1-2

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 100, 1-2.

CONCLUSIONS

Now that we have achieved the goal which we set for ourselves at the beginning of our investigation, how should we respond to Reverend Hare Duke's comment that, "The current interest in NDE studies can be explained by the search for an apparently scientific reassurance about life after death in an age which has abandoned faith"¹? Behind such an opinion lies the recognition that the NDE has indeed become a significant phenomenon within the largely secularised Western cultural context, apparently offering insights into the spiritual nature of human being independent of established, institutional religion. Yet, underlying Hare Duke's assessment of this situation is the presupposition that such "insights" are fundamentally eschatological, that what the NDE has to offer, even if it is not considered valid, is answers regarding the mysteries of what happens when, and after, a human being dies. Given the popular portrayal of the NDE this assumption would seem to be justified, but when one is presenting what is supposed to be a scholarly, or research-based, interpretation of such an important phenomenon, or any phenomenon for that sake, it becomes paramount to examine closely the validity of such popular, commonly held interpretative presuppositions. However, when we surveyed the existing theological interpretations of the NDE we found that few, if any, explored the NDE outside of an eschatological, or pareschatological, context. Specifically, we identified three ways in which the NDE is explained in terms of what it can, or cannot, tell us about death, or, more accurately, life after death: as a

1) literal experience of physical death; 2) symbolic death experience; or 3) psychologically, physiologically, and/or pharmacologically based delusion of either a dying person or one who only thinks he/she is dying. In the interest then of coming to a critically informed understanding of the NDE ourselves, we then determined to study carefully the NDE research itself and, in the light of this, the validity of interpreting the NDE within strictly par/eschatological/eschatological boundaries. Let us then reserve our final comments on Hare Duke's observation above until we finish reviewing the nature of the course upon which our investigation took us and the site at which we eventually arrived.

To begin with we established the philosophical prolegomena for positing the survival of physical death as a logical possibility, finding that, essentially, this can be attempted in three ways: 1) the Platonic or Platonic-Cartesian way, 2) the way of the astral body, and 3) the reconstitutionist way (encompassing resurrection as well). We rejected the reconstitutionist/resurrectionist and astral body "ways" on the grounds that, by definition and in contrast to the reconstituted/resurrected individual, NDErs claim to continue "existing" upon the occasion of what seems to be the death of their physical bodies and because the validity of the astral body way would itself depend on the assumption that the NDE is primarily a par/eschatological phenomenon. Thus, in relation to the Platonic-Cartesian way, we were then able to ascertain the criteria to be used in assessing whether or not the contents, or phenomena, of the NDE event itself actually

support its own interpretation within par/eschatological context. This was done via a detailed analysis of how the Platonic-Cartesian way is used to address the three fundamental questions relating to the logical possibility of the survival of physical death: 1) what it is that survives death such that it can be properly described as a "person" (i.e., the ontological question), 2) how does one identify this post-mortem person with some previously living pre-mortem individual (i.e., the epistemological question), and 3) what kinds of experiences might a subject in a post-mortem world have such that this subject could be identified, again, as a "person" (i.e., the existential question). However, before we were able to continue we first had to construct a comprehensive NDE typology based on the most reliable research done on the NDE itself to date.

Using a set of rigorous criteria we were able to find ten major NDE studies among which existed an extremely high level of homogeneity concerning both their study populations and research methodologies. These provided a solid base of phenomenological data specific to Western, Moody-type near-death events, i.e., those events which have become the source for the popular, Western conceptuality of what happens when a person dies. Summarising the NDE typological profile which emerged, it is noted first that, generally, during this ineffable, real, and timeless experience NDErs characteristically possess an overwhelming feeling of peace and well-being as well as profoundly enhanced sensual and cognitive abilities. Even though in every case NDErs retain their sense of personal identity, they necessarily believe themselves to be "outside" of their

physical bodies. Sometimes they remain in the immediate physical environment where they are able to see their bodies and any unfolding events. However, they are neither able to affect matter nor communicate with others physically present (i.e., autoscopic NDEs). In other cases experiencers go straight into a transcendent realm (i.e., transcendent NDEs), while for the rest the experience begins with autoscopic NDE phenomena which are immediately followed by transcendent (i.e., combined NDEs). Either at the start of the NDE or following the autoscopic portion, some experiencers find themselves in a void or absolutely dark space. Invariably a transitional NDE type, experiencers tend to move through this area towards a special NDE light. This may be followed by an encounter with an "NDE God" (e.g., a being of light or authoritative presence), interaction with other spiritual entities (e.g., religious figures or deceased loved ones), a life review, and/or entry into a transcendent, otherworldly setting. We saw that these NDE types are not necessarily mutually exclusive and are not always experienced in this order. If remembered the experiencer's "return" can be facilitated by any one of these types. And finally, we saw that in half of these cases the NDEr makes the decision to return while in the others he/she is sent back.

Our actual assessment of the predominant theological interpretative context for the NDE began with the affirmation that the typological structure which had emerged would permit one to make a positive correlation between the NDE and the fundamental criteria for positing disembodied survival of physical death, i.e., a dualistic conceptualisation of personhood.

However, moving on to the existential question specifically, it was determined that, due largely to the radical nature of the NDE's external intentionality, both the contents and course of events in the "NDE world" extend far beyond what would be expected in reference to the survival criterion of a mind-dependent world. In relation to the epistemological question we then reached the conclusion that the standard psychological approaches were also incompatible with the NDE event, fundamentally on the grounds that external verification of the NDEr's unique memories and/or character traits is an impossibility. As we moved on to a consideration of the ontological question itself it became quite clear that, because the NDEr's consciousness itself becomes the essence of his/her being during the NDE event, there is a positive correlation between the experient as an "essential self" and the Cartesian and Platonic notions of personhood. We thus reached the conclusion that there is an extremely low degree of compatibility between the NDE content and the logical possibility of the survival of physical death, thus making largely unacceptable the par/eschatological interpretative contextualization of the NDE. In addition, during the course of this analysis we discovered that there existed what seemed to be a rather intimate relationship between the NDE typology and the ontological question of personhood.

Having recognised in chapter one that it would be quite unacceptable to assess the contextualisation of the NDE purely from the point of view of what is philosophically feasible, our next goal was to examine the available research findings relating to the NDE

context, i.e., the NDE's after-effects as well as its "cause(s)", or etiology.

Again, based on the most rigorous NDE research available, our investigation of the NDE after-effects strengthened our previous findings. In the first instance our general findings were that, although both NDErs and non-NDErs experience a post-event change in life-affirming attitudes in a variety of ways, there is generally a deeper integration of these for NDErs on what most researchers have described as a "spiritual" level. We went on to discover that the unique, NDE-specific after-effects included a highly significant 1) decreased fear of death, 2) increased belief in a positive afterlife, 3) increase in experiences of psychic/spiritual phenomena, and 4) increase in spirituality. Then, taking into consideration the relatively rarely reported negative NDE and its unambiguous after-effects [i.e., an increased belief in 1) life after death, 2) God or a supreme being, 3) heaven and hell, and 4) that an evil force exists], it was finally determined that there was a positive and proportionate correlation between an NDE after-effect's degree of ontological significance, givenness, lack of ambiguity, and NDE-specificity. In fact, the data strongly suggested that the *less par/eschatological and the more ontological significant a post-event change was the more NDE-specific, or NDE-unique it would be.* Hence, here we had little choice but to give a negative answer to the question which we had posed along with our concluding observations concerning the NDE event: Can the after-effects provide us with incontestable evidence that NDErs actually do suffer physical death, or at

least, literally experience the first few moments of being dead?

We began our consideration of the NDE etiology by first reviewing the fundamental ways in which the reductionists, or "sceptics", have explain away the uniqueness of the NDE via physiological, pharmacological, and/or psychological etiological theories. We then briefly reviewed the standard responses employed by the majority of primary NDE researchers. It was then, in our own analysis of this information, along with many more research-based findings relating to the possible cause(s) of the NDE's, that we made several critical discoveries. For instance, although it has been found that in some cases there is a slight correlation between the nature of the phenomena experienced during the NDE and the experient's physical condition, the up-to-date research has proven that *it is the perception of imminent death which triggers an NDE not physiological trauma itself*. Given the fact that the experient's cultural conditioning and prior expectations probably do play a part in the phenomenological make-up of individual's NDEs, it was also found that both the reality of children's NDEs along with the contradictions between experient's physiological and psychological conditions severely undermined the psychological reduction of the NDE. Even the most convincing psychological theory, that of depersonalization, was found to be substantially different from the nature of the NDE on many critical points. And finally, the pharmacological reduction of the NDE was seen to be untenable for at least two reasons: 1) many people have had NDEs without the

presence of drugs in their systems, and 2) unlike the vast majority of drug-induced altered-realities, experiencers consistently speak of the objective "reality" of the NDE long after it has taken place. In relation to both the psychological and the pharmacological etiological theories, it was then seen that perhaps the most accurate understanding of the NDE's cause had to do with a non-reductive understanding of Altered States of Consciousness. Hence, in the end, our analysis once again resulted in the rejection of the par/eschatological contextualization of the NDE; explanations which reduce the NDE to *nothing but* the reactions of the experiencer's body or mind to a real or perceived threat of physical death were all found to be either indefensible or extremely problematic. This was not all though, for this also marked the end of our extensive investigation of the predominant theological presupposition concerning the NDE's fundamental significance. Just as our detailed consideration of the NDE's etiology itself also strongly suggested that the real meaning of the NDE has to do with the nature of consciousness itself and the issue of personal identity, we reached a firm conclusion regarding the primary issue driving our investigation up to that point: *the primary significance of the NDE is not located within an interpretative context that is pareschatological or eschatological, but, more fundamentally, one which is ontological.*

Having at this point discovered that the most appropriate interpretative context for the NDE should be ontological, we continued by formulating our own phenomenological explication of the NDE. Such a

methodology was seen as particularly fitting for two reasons: 1) the phenomenological method, ideally, is itself grounded on uncovering the nature of human consciousness, and 2) it would allow us to seek out the NDE's ontological meaning without having to make a judgement concerning the, as yet, enigmatic issue of the experient's literal disembodiment. Indeed, this method proved to be quite fruitful, leading us see the NDE not as an experience about death at all but about living life more fully and deliberately. Hence our conceptualisation of the NDE as an "Imperative of Vitality" (IV), i.e., an authoritative, external exhortation to live one's life authentically by conforming one's existential self to what is revealed - during the NDE event and afterward via the given after-effects - to be one's essential being. In terms of a linear perspective the NDE as an IV was described in terms of a crisis threatening to destroy the existential self which is followed by the individual's rescue via a transmutation of this self and its context. The disclosure of the experient's transmuted, "essential" self and its context then takes place, eventually leading, either explicitly or implicitly, to the experient's commission to "return" to his/her existential context so that he/she can become more fully what, and accordingly who, he/she is essentially. It was also recognized that even the negative NDE evidences itself as an IV. Our reflections here on the *NDE-specific* after-effects were found to be highly supportive of the NDE as an IV, particularly in the sense that they tend to re-shape as well as intensify one's post-NDE existence. Having come to deep understanding of the NDE on an

ontological level, we concluded our "re-description" by recognizing its limitations; noting that there were still important issues concerning the very essence of the NDE which still needed to be addressed.

This is where our own theological treatment of the NDE started, with the awareness that as a highly significant ontological reality the NDE raised questions which called for its treatment in a spiritual or religious context. Hence, we were faced with the decision of choosing which spiritual/religious context(s) we would continue our investigation within, as it would be impossible to offer an exhaustive theological assessment of the NDE as an IV given the size and variety of even the worlds major religions. Proceeding then, we set ourselves the task of examining the NDE from two different Christian Reformed perspectives; one representative of a general, conservative view point and the other based on the mature, liberal theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

In relation to both perspectives, the extent of the positive, ontological correlations that we were able to make was quite surprising. At the heart of these was the notion that in order for people to appropriate their true being it is necessary for them to undergo a reorientation of their personal identity, such that conscious communion with the transcendent Ground of one's existence becomes an essential part of one's being. Yet, even here on the ontological level, the basic difference between the conservative and Schleiermacher's position manifest itself quite clearly. In relation to the former our analysis enabled us to determine that the NDE would be seen as an event in

which one's very being is changed, while for the latter the same phenomenon would be described as a pivotal, lasting change in an individual's self-consciousness. Ultimately, the overwhelmingly positive, ontological relationships between the NDE and these Reformed perspectives, made it possible for us to further deepen and clarify our understanding of the NDE, specifically as an Imperative of Vitality. The same can be said in reference to our exploration of the NDE on the theological level, although our insights here were derived just as much from the discord as from the harmony which was discovered to exist between the NDE and our two Reformed perspectives.

As our exploration of the NDE in relation to the conservative model of conversion, via the efficacious Call of God, advanced the radical externality of the NDE was seen to compare positively with the idea of God's sovereignty, yet the unmediated, unconditional and continual availability of the NDE's transcendent Ground could not be reconciled with the conservative assertion of God's Self-alienation for all those whose existence is not unequivocally transformed to Being-in-Christ, i.e., God's elect. Only the fact that negative NDErs tend to convert to Bible-based Christianity, due largely to their perception of being attacked by evil forces/entities during and after their NDEs, saved the positive NDE from being theologically interpreted as a deceptive vision provided by the Devil. Highlighting the crucial difference between the conservative and Schleiermacher's notions of Revelation, we reached our theological climax with Schleiermacher when his model of religious experiences enabled us to formulate a theory

which seemed to account for much of the NDE's content and context. The essential connections here were 1) the identification of the NDEr's "essential self" with the "posited self" in the "feeling of absolute dependence", and 2) the NDE's transcendent Ground with God as one's Whence. As helpful as this theory was to our exploration of the NDE, nevertheless, we still came to the conclusion that the positive NDEr invariably feels no need to be "redeemed" (by Jesus Christ), while the negative NDEr's belief in the existence of evil entities and fear of eternal damnation were both found to be inconsistent with Schleiermacher's theological position.

Therefore, even though we eventually reached the same theological conclusion as many others have in the past (i.e., that, within the theological contexts in question, the NDE does not seem to be a theologically significant phenomenon), it was not based on a reductionist perspective. Because of this fact, our theological investigation was notably constructive, facilitating a relatively comprehensive understanding of the NDE's nature. In addition, we have no doubt produced material which would be invaluable to those whose own theological position approximates to one of the two theological orientations considered, especially if they were to find themselves "ministering" to NDErs. These same positive observations can be contrasted with those other, previous theological treatments of the NDE which, though not necessarily reductionistic, because they restricted their treatments of the NDE to that which was paseschatologically or eschatologically relevant, misrepresented the NDE and/or failed to see

its more fundamental implications within their own particular theological contexts.

If we return to Hare Duke's comment we now notice right away that not only does it underline what we have conclusively found to be an invalid approach to the subject of Near-Death Experiences by most theologians, but, as noted above, it also recognises the important role which the NDE plays in moulding the "spiritual" lives of those who have, as he puts it, "abandoned faith". Perhaps there is even more to so many theologians' dismissal of the NDE than the facile acceptance of the reductionists arguments. Could it be that, rooted in the misunderstanding that the NDE's primary significance is eschatological, these theologians have been somewhat daunted by the NDE? Whatever the case may be the reality is that there is a great deal of work to be done on investigating the *ontologically significant* NDE from within the vast range of religious/spiritual contexts which exist today. Of particular help in this task would be more major, primary phenomenological studies of the NDE which included detailed enquiries concerning the experient's pre- and post-NDE religious/spiritual beliefs and behaviours. Yet even without such new data, the now pervasive Near-Death Experience is simply too important for theologians not to take it seriously and study it comprehensively, making use of the serious NDE-research which is presently available.

ENDNOTE

¹ Hare Duke, M. (1993) Book review of "Transformed by the light" by Morse, M., and Perry, P., *The Christian Parapsychologist*, 10 (1), 28-29.

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